

INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

External Fraction of the International Communist Current

Tasks of the Fraction

Decline of the ICC

International Situation

Documents

n° 1

\$1.50/£1

quarterly

winter 1986

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The external Fraction of the International Communist Current was formed in Nov. 1985 in reaction to the political and organizational degeneration of the ICC. The decline of the ICC, today's main pole of regroupment of revolutionary forces, is certainly a blow for the working class. Our Fraction wants to work towards overcoming the present situation; it will try to represent a programmatic and organic continuity with the bases of the ICC by learning from the lessons of its failure and helping to create a bridge to a future pole of regroupment.

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The departure point of a marxist analysis is the ability to see the international situation as a totality whose 3 main aspects - the economic crisis, inter-imperialist antagonisms and the class struggle - interact. The task of revolutionaries is to trace the general evolution of the situation but also to grasp how these general tendencies are concretized in reality. It is with this perspective that we analyze the evolution of the international situation for the past two years.

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This article tells the history of the debates which have taken place in the ICC over the past two years and identifies a process of degeneration on the level of political positions and the internal life of the organization. It traces the different stages of the struggle we carried on inside the ICC as a tendency and tries to analyze the reasons for the failure of the ICC.

DOCUMENTS

We publish here a selection of some of the texts we wrote as a tendency :

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- DECLARATION OF THE FORMATION OF A TENDENCY:

Dated March 1985, and censored by the ICC, this document summarizes the basis of the tendency formed to fight against the degeneration.

- RESOLUTION ON CENTRISM AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS OF THE PROLETARIAT :

This text is a synthesis of our position on the question of centrism and its theoretical and practical implications in the period of the decadence of capitalism.

- OUR FUNCTION TODAY : A CRITIQUE OF THE INTERVENTION OF THE ICC :

Through a critique of the ICC's regressions on intervention, this text is a first step towards trying to make the role of revolutionaries clearer in the present period.

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International Perspective will regularly hold Public Meetings as an integral part of its determination to actively stimulate a real debate and discussion around the vital issues that face revolutionaries and the working class. Our first Public Meeting will be on :

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The meeting will be held :

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2:30 pm SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 1986

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\$5.00 US / £ 3.50 UK

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In Belgium (for the French edition) :
B.P. 1181 Centre Monnaie
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THE TASKS OF OUR FRACTION

Ten years ago in 1975 the International Communist Current was founded. It was a historic occasion. After the dark years of a half-century of counter-revolution, a new pole of organised revolutionary activity emerged in the course of the powerful wave of class struggle that marked the reawakening of the international proletariat between 1968 and 1973. There were other organisations in the proletarian camp at that time, particularly the Bordigist and councilist currents. But these organisations, suffering from sclerosis after their long struggle for survival during the period of counter-revolution, were incapable of recognising the change in the historic course opened by the reawakening of the proletariat and unable to play a positive role towards regroupment and intervention in the working class. In spite of weaknesses, the ICC represented a real step forward for the proletariat in this situation, the crystallisation of a new life around a clear political platform, the result of an effort still diffuse in the class. The ICC was to demonstrate this new vitality over the years by becoming a pole of reference within the proletarian political milieu.

But for an organisation to live and develop, it is not enough to put its platform in the archives and simply devote itself to dealing with immediate issues. History goes forward and raises old questions in new forms, and those who are unable to keep up are condemned to fall by the wayside. With the '80s, history accelerated, imposing the hard truth of capitalist crisis in all its forms on the working class: ideological and material pressure of the bourgeoisie seeking to stifle all expression of class struggle, the need to develop the working class struggle and consciousness to a higher level towards the internationalist perspective of the communist revolution. This acceleration of history, with the heightening of the stakes of class struggle and the increasing pressure of the capitalist state on the proletariat, has led to a continuing general crisis of the proletarian political milieu. Its most spectacular manifestations were the collapse of immature organisations or sclerotic ones like the Bordigist International Communist Party (Programma Comunista) in 1982. But this crisis has affected all exist-

ing organisations to one degree or another through crises and splits, including the ICC. Our Fraction is the product of this crisis which has not completed its course of a forced selection process in today's revolutionary milieu.

The primary characteristic, the originality, of this crisis is that it is not taking place in a period of counter-revolution but in a course towards mounting class struggle; in fact it occurs in moments of open expression of class struggle. The first phase of sharp crisis came with the second wave of international class struggle in 1978-81, particularly in relation to the steel strike in Britain and the mass strike in Poland. The second phase (at least for the ICC up to now) comes during the third wave of class struggle begun at the end of 1983. This characteristic is explained by the slow, uneven and difficult course of class struggle in reaction to the present economic crisis which, in comparison to a reaction to world war, raises problems at the very heart of the system (economic relations between the classes) but works towards the collapse of the system through a longer process. In such a process, moments of open struggle tend to be key moments, testing the validity of revolutionary organisations in relation to the evolution of history, particularly their conception of the development of class consciousness and their function in this development. It's not an accident that all the crises and splits in the rest of the revolutionary milieu, have been linked to the question of class consciousness and the party. This is the vital challenge of our time (and to some extent of the whole history of the workers' movement) to revolutionaries today.

The second wave of class struggle had already profoundly shaken the ICC in 1980-81 with the appearance of immediatist and activist tendencies leading to departures and splits in the organisation. But with the third wave of struggle today the weaknesses of the ICC have reappeared on the surface with even greater force. This time it is the entire organisation that has been drawn into a process of degeneration through the adoption of an orientation that turns its back on some of its most fundamental principles, a voluntarist

orientation taking elements from Trotskyism in the '30s when it was still in the proletarian camp. To understand better the ICC's trajectory these past few years, culminating in the Sixth Congress which definitively confirmed this course, we refer the reader to the article on this subject in this issue. Here we shall simply give an overview of the essential points which deal with general political positions as well as the questions of intervention and internal functioning.

1. The regressions affected the most fundamental issues first, the question of the political principles of the organisation. Faced with the difficulty of understanding and characterising the complex process of the development of class consciousness in the present period, the ICC sought refuge in confused formulations inherited from Leninism, claiming a difference between 'class consciousness' and 'consciousness of the class', a modern and incoherent version of the difference between 'communist consciousness' and 'trade union consciousness' established by Kautsky and then Lenin. This was done despite the fact that the ICC's original position on class consciousness had been based on the rejection of this very distinction. The acceptance of this distinction led to a position decreeing that councilism was 'the greatest danger for the working class' while the danger of substitutionism disappeared like magic, simply becoming the expression of 'the backwardness of Russia' within the Russian proletariat in the 1917 Revolution. This was in complete contradiction to the principled position of the ICC on the bourgeois nature of substitutionism and the simultaneous rejection of both councilism and Bordigism as symmetrical expressions of the same false vision of class consciousness and the party. Finally, these regressions were capped by a return to Trotsky's theory of centrism from the '30s defining 'centrism' in psychological terms, characterised by hesitating behaviour and conciliation of antagonistic positions. 'Centrism' is supposedly seen as the essential and permanent disease of the workers' movement. Applied to the history of the workers' movement in the period of decadence, this theory shows its dangerous implications by questioning the nature of the proletariat, the lessons drawn from the German Revolution, the bourgeois nature of Social-Democracy in the First World War, the bourgeois nature of Stalinism after the adoption of 'socialism in one country' and of Trotskyism after its 'critical support' for the Second World War - in total contradiction to the very platform of the ICC. Readers of the ICC press have already read some of the criticisms we made of

these theories in some few articles that managed to surface in the International Review 41 and 43 and in Internationalisme 100 (which was translated into English, after being cut, in World Revolution 88). We are publishing in this issue and in future ones articles and texts developing our positions on these questions.

2. These theoretical regressions then gradually invaded the domain of intervention. The ICC began by decreeing that activism was no longer a significant danger in a period of mounting class struggle - in contradiction to the lessons drawn from its own crisis in 1981. Then, little by little, it slipped into an immediatist and voluntarist approach towards intervention which culminated in concessions on principles in relation to unionism through a leftist position on systematically calling workers to participate in unions 'days of action' and union demonstrations to transform them into workers' assemblies. Readers will find a critique of the ICC's intervention in this issue.

3. It is in regard to its internal life that the degeneration of the ICC is most pronounced, a caricature of itself, a total repudiation of its principles of functioning concerning how to carry on debates in a revolutionary organisation: personal attacks and disciplinary resolutions against minority comrades, prohibiting non-secret and open discussions among minority comrades before their formation into a tendency, the decision to close debate just as the tendency was formed, censoring public texts of the tendency such as its declaration of existence (which we print in this issue), proposals to change the platform and statutes of the organisation without explanation or debate ...

After all this, the ICC pronounced its own definitive condemnation by expelling the tendency from the highest moment of the organisation - the Sixth International Congress, whose agenda included no less than the proposed changes in the platform and statutes - after a sordid manoeuvre compared to which the International Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista) throwing the ICC out of the International Conferences of the Communist Left in 1980 seems like a friendly act of choir boys. An organisation that rejects its own life, its own critique, with such scorn for principles cannot claim to be able to work towards the regroupment of revolutionary forces.

Faced with this very grave situation and expulsion, our Fraction was constituted outside the organisational framework of the ICC, in continuity with the fight waged by the tendency within the organ-

isation. The degeneration of the main pole of regroupment of revolutionary forces that the ICC represented is a blow for the world proletariat which cannot be blotted out by any pompous voluntaristic declarations. It is not in a day that one pole of regroupment is replaced automatically by another. In this degeneration is expressed the incapacity of the entire revolutionary milieu in crisis to live up to its responsibility to prepare for the future proletarian class party. But by facing up to this objective reality, we do not wish to propagate any wave of pessimism. The potential of class struggle is greater than ever, the main battles are still to come and the bulk of future revolutionary forces as well. Despite its limited number, our Fraction is an international one and contains a majority of the founding members of the ICC section in the US, Great Britain and Belgium. In this sense, the failure of the experience of the ICC is only a partial failure, like many others that the class will have to suffer before the final victory. We have confidence in the future of the class struggle and in the future of our Fraction.

By insisting on the gravity of the present situation and by forming a Fraction, we want to emphasise the fact that the present crisis in the revolutionary milieu can be overcome only by a painstaking and profound critical examination of the weaknesses of this milieu. This is the only way today's promise can become tomorrow's reality. In this perspective, our Fraction has taken on the following tasks that have always been tasks of fractions in the past:

(1) To represent a programmatic and organic continuity with the pole of regroupment that the ICC used to be. Whether or not the platform and statutes of the ICC were officially changed at the Sixth Congress, it is clear that the ICC has in fact ceased to defend them on essential points. We defend the platform and statutes the ICC elaborated in the past as the highest point attained by the workers' movement in the clarification of its revolutionary principles up to now, and as the necessary basis for any further step forward in this clarification.

(2) To draw the lessons of the experience of the ICC for the workers' movement and develop the necessary programmatic advances. The proletariat can overcome the failure of an experience only if it goes to the roots of the weaknesses that caused this failure and draws the lessons for the future. This work, that we had already begun within

the ICC and which found its first formal developed expression in the resolution on centrism printed in this issue, has to be continued in order to overcome the contradictions which appear in the ICC and the revolutionary milieu today. In particular, the demands of today's period and the incompleteness of the legacy of the Communist Lefts make a development of Marxist theory on class consciousness and the role of the party absolutely vital.

(3) Finally, as a consequence of the above tasks, to try to establish a bridge between the old pole of regroupment of revolutionary forces that was the ICC and the new pole which will develop in the future course of class struggle.

But the unique character of the present historical situation also imposes on us tasks which are qualitatively different from those of the Left Fractions in the period of counter-revolution:

(i) Because we are not in a course towards historic reflux in class struggle, the Fraction should not be going against the current of the general movement of the class, should not isolate itself, but, on the contrary, must place itself within this movement, learning from it and contributing to it.

(ii) Because we do not come from a class party evolving towards betrayal but from a current, a group among others in a political milieu unable to fulfill its function of preparing for the future party, the Fraction should not confine itself to a struggle for the regeneration of any particular organisation but should see itself as an active factor in helping to overcome the weaknesses of all of the existing revolutionary forces.

(iii) Therefore, its activity should be oriented towards creating the conditions for a new pole of regroupment of revolutionary forces and intervention in class struggle so as to live up to the responsibilities that the proletariat imposes on revolutionaries in the present period of international class struggle.

We appeal to all revolutionary groups and elements to work, by means of contacts, debate and a serious confrontation of positions, for the rebirth of a real revolutionary milieu able to further the clarification of the class positions of the proletariat, leading to the regroupment of a clear revolutionary vanguard.

REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

The purpose of a report on the international situation is to draw a balance sheet of the preceding period and to provide a perspective for the period to come. The function of a marxist analysis of the international situation is to serve as a basis for the intervention of revolutionaries in the struggle of their class, in the battles that the proletariat is forced to wage against its capitalist antagonist. In this sense, marxist analysis is guided throughout by Lenin's dictum that without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary practice.

The indispensable starting point for a marxist analysis is the recognition that the international situation constitutes a totality, the 3 principal moments of which -the economic crisis, inter-imperialist antagonisms and the class struggle- are dialectically interconnected. Any tendency to abstract one of these moments from the totality in which it is embedded, fatally condemns the analysis and the practice to which it gives rise. This was the case, for example, with the Vercesi tendency of the Italian faction of the Communist Left in the late 1930's, which saw the class struggle as alone determining the international situation and so failed to understand the development of interimperialist antagonism, and was thereby 'surprised' by the outbreak of the imperialist war. Similarly, this was the case with Bordiga after World War II. While correctly recognizing the potential for a period of reconstruction before the outbreak of another open economic crisis, he failed to grasp the extent to which the postwar epoch would be characterized by extremely sharp inter-imperialist antagonisms between the Russian and American blocs. Another example of this tendency was the failure of both wings of the Italian left (the 'Programmists' around Bordiga-Haffi and the 'Battaglists' around Damen) to recognize the upsurge of the proletariat beginning with May '68 in France and the 'hot autumn' of 1969 in Italy. The latest example of this tendency to fail to grasp the dialectical interconnection between the 3 moments of the international situation is that of the ICC. Beginning from the correct recognition that the present period is characterized by a course towards decisive conflicts between the proletariat and capital, the ICC has begun to

fixate its interest exclusively on the development of the class struggle 'in itself' and increasingly limits its treatment of the development of the economic crisis and the evolution of inter-imperialist antagonisms to a repetition of what it has already said.. Thereby it completely overlooks the fact that developments at one level of the international situation are both produced by, and lead to, significant changes at the other levels as well. The result of such a tendency to abstraction is inevitably to theoretically disarm an organisation of revolutionaries in the face of the vital tasks for which the class itself generates it.

In analyzing the international situation, it is the task of revolutionaries to always point out the 'line of march', as Marx and Engels said in the Communist Manifesto. What separates marxism from the empiricism of the bourgeoisie, is precisely its capacity to lay bare the general laws or tendencies which characterize the development of a mode of production and the evolution of the international situation in a given period. However, the capacity to grasp the general tendencies ('laws' for marxism always work themselves out as tendencies) or perspectives which characterize the international situation, and which is the product of the marxist methodology, must go hand in hand with the recognition that such laws or tendencies assert themselves in objective reality through a series of complex mediations, and by giving rise to counter-tendencies, which if they do not block the development of the general tendency, certainly affect both the manner and tempo in which it asserts itself. The conception which bases itself on an immediate and absolute equation between the general tendencies, which marxist theory elucidates, and the actual facts of objective reality itself, is schematism. Schematism, with its inability to recognize the objective weight of the complex mediations and the interaction of the dominant tendency and the counter-tendencies which its development generates, not only sterilizes revolutionary theory, but makes revolutionary practice impossible. This was the case, for example, with the CWO at the time of the mass strike in Poland (1980), and their equation of the indisputable general tendency towards decisive and violent confrontations between the

proletariat and capital leading to a pre-revolutionary situation and the actual balance between the contending classes at that time. The result of the CWO's schematism was their adventurist call for an immediate insurrection, which had that organisation any real influence in the ranks of the working class in Poland, could have had disastrous consequences. Similarly, the ICC's oft repeated insistence on the imminent reappearance of hyper-inflation in the key centers of world capitalism constitutes a dangerous slide into schematism by its failure to recognize the complex mediations through which that general tendency will, in fact, assert itself. The constant repetition of the imminence of hyper-inflation cannot replace a real marxist analysis of the precise way in which this tendency imposes itself in objective reality, and the counter-tendencies which decisively affect the rhythm of this development. This is also the case with the ICC's failure to recognize that while the basic tendency in interimperialist antagonisms in the present period is an offensive of the American bloc, this

very tendency itself both produces counter-tendencies and is imposed only by the way of a complex series of mediations --these latter having virtually ceased to exist for the ICC. Schematism also characterizes the ICC's analysis of the development of the class struggle in the present period. In this case, the ICC sees only the dominant tendency (the tendency towards ever sharper class confrontations as the 3d wave of class struggle mounts), but completely fails to see the complicated and tortuous process by which this tendency actually materializes, in particular the process of the development of class consciousness within the proletariat, thereby fetishizing the "3d wave" and seeing the role of revolutionaries as that of "mobilizing" the class, after the model of a general staff.

The price of schematism -which is the abandonment of the methodology of marxism- is always the destruction of the capacity of the organisation which embraces it to carry out the vital functions for which the class has generated it: revolutionary intervention.

The Economic Crisis

Over the past 2 years the ideologists and spokesmen for American capitalism have made extravagant claims to the effect that an economic 'recovery' has taken place after the devastating recession that struck world capitalism in 1980. During the '70's, a collapse of production as a result of the saturation of the world market was prevented -though not without 2 increasingly severe recessions and generalized stagnation-by massive recourse to the drug of credit and the inflation of the money supply. This Keynesian policy of credit expansion so as to ward off the economic catastrophe which the lack of effective demand on the world market would otherwise have produced, spawned a galloping inflation in the metropoles of capitalism, and-by the late 1970's- raised the spectre of hyper-inflation and the collapse of the international monetary system. The recession which followed was the longest and deepest of the 3 which have struck world capitalism since the reappearance of the open crisis after the completion of the phase of reconstruction following World War II (at the end of the 1960's). In this section of the report, we intend to refute the claims made by the apologists for capitalism that a durable economic recovery is taking place and that the inflationary danger has been successfully removed.

Even a brief look at the world economy at the end of 1985 is sufficient to see that on a global basis there has been no economic recovery.

In most of the so-called Third World, the descent into the abyss of total economic collapse has continued unabated as the loans which kept these economies afloat during the '70's (and created artificial markets for the exports of the capitalist metropoles) have dried up. The few 'third world' economies which were denominated genuine 'economic miracles' during the 70's (Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea) are now in the grip of a devastating recession as their industrial production and exports plummet in the face of a saturated world market, and the protectionism and bitter competition this provokes. This is also the case with the oil producing countries (eg. Saudi-Arabia, Nigeria, Indonesia) which in the last year alone have seen oil prices drop by 20% and are condemned to an increasing stagnation. For the bulk of the Latin American, Asiatic and African economies, which knew neither "economic miracle" nor an oil boom which could significantly offset their underdevelopment during the '70's, two paths have been open in the 1980's : those countries whose industrial base, level of indebtedness or strategic value make it difficult for the American bloc to permit a total collapse (eg. Mexico, Brazil, Ar-

gentina, India), are kept afloat in a condition of dependence just short of bankruptcy, in which their exports cannot even (or can just barely) cover the interest on their external debt. In order to pay their creditors, the capitalist state apparatus of these countries must -in the name of "nationalism" and "democracy"- find some ideological formula through which to facilitate the brutal imposition of the most draconian austerity on the working class and the impoverished masses without any possibility of ever escaping the agony to which the terminal illness of world capitalism condemns them. Those countries whose total collapse poses no real threat to the stability of world capital (e.g. Bangladesh, Uganda, Liberia, Ghana) are undergoing an historical retrogression into a subsistence economy as a result of the global crisis. However, this constitutes no return to the communal subsistence economies of precapitalist societies, but a barbaric reality of famine and rapine, of permanent war, in which the starving peasantry is brutalized and plundered by the well armed local capitalist state apparatus or by rival armies seeking to grab state power and make themselves the local functionaries of capitalist 'order'.

Even in the metropoles of the American bloc, the 'recovery' has been limited to only 3 countries: the US, Japan and West Germany. West Germany apart, in the European heartland of world capitalism the past 2 years have witnessed a continued shrinkage of the industrial base (as whole regions are affected by the shutdown of once profitable industries, e.g. the midlands in England, the Denain-Longwy steel basin and Le Creusot with its engineering industry in France, the Liege-Charleroi heavy industrial basin in Belgium) and unemployment rates ranging from 10% to over 15% in Holland (even using the official figures which drastically underestimate the magnitude of the problem. This planned scaling down of the industrial base in a vain effort to rationalize each national capital for the increasingly bitter competition on a shrinking world market, and the continued massive overproduction of the commodity labor-power belie the claims that a recovery has occurred. The improvement in the performance of the Japanese and West German economies over the past 2 years has but one real cause: a massive export offensive on the US-market. Virtually the whole of the bloated trade balance of Japan and West Germany, on which their "economic recovery" totally depends, can be accounted for by the unprecedented trade deficit which the U.S. has run up: this trade deficit, which has already reached 130.4 billion dollars in 1985, has made possible the upturn in Japan and West-Germany (as well

as a certain temporary stabilization in the ailing economies of the rest of Western Europe). However, neither such a trade deficit nor the over-valued dollar which contributes to it will be allowed to continue. Thus, as the U.S. takes steps to decrease its trade deficit and to devalue the dollar, the recovery in Japan and West-Germany will be choked off. Moreover, no replacement for the American market can possibly be found. Indeed, in the face of the recent devaluation of the dollar and increasing protectionist sentiment in the ranks of segments of American capital, Japan has begun to reflate its domestic economy. Nonetheless, quite apart from the timidity of the measures taken, any significant reflationary policy must increase the budget deficit, provoke domestic inflation and lead to higher prices for Japanese goods on the world market, thereby directly undermining the export capacity on which the profitability of Japan's economy is dependent. In short, the prospects for Japan, West Germany (and the rest of Western Europe) is for a new and more severe economic downturn, which will follow in the wake of the course set by the American economy and give the lie to the oft repeated claims of a durable economic recovery.

Inasmuch as the so-called recovery has been largely dependent on the "expansion" of the American market and concentrated in the U.S., it is there that we must look in order to determine whether there is a basis for the claims that a durable recovery has occurred. A look at the American economy quickly reveals both the shallowness and the limits of the economic upturn of the past 2 years -the main function of which, in any case, was to assure the reelection of Ronald Reagan as President and to give time to the ruling class to better prepare for the impending economic storms. From November 1984 to November 1985, industrial production in the U.S. rose only 1.1%. This key economic indicator already demonstrates the shallowness of the American economic recovery and the fact that it is already drawing to a close. Indeed, if we look at the investment in producer durable goods, i.e., the factories and machinery on which an industrialized economy depends, in basic sectors of the American economy between 1979-1984, the picture that emerges is one of an impending and unprecedented shrinkage of the manufacturing base of the giant of world capitalism: investment in manufacturing machinery and equipment as a whole has declined 12.3%; investment in agricultural and construction machinery has declined 47.2%; while investment in plant and machinery for the production of trucks, aircraft, ships and railroad equipment has fallen 18.9%.

In 1984, construction of new industrial plants in the U.S. was 26.2% below its already anemic level of 1979. Clearly, far from gearing-up for a durable economic recovery, American capital is engaged in a concerted reduction of its very economic base. Where then has the vaunted economic recovery occurred? Three sectors of the American economy have known a significant upturn over the past few years. First, the production of military goods and armaments, which has jumped by 50% between 1979-1984. Second, the construction of office buildings and other commercial real estate development in the big cities has boomed in the wake of a speculative binge. Third, a considerable expansion of high-technology industries-whose output is basically destined for the military and financial sector of the economy, and not industrial production- has occurred. As these cases demonstrate, what has taken place is a recovery limited to the unproductive (in value terms) sectors of the economy, which constitutes a sterilization of capital on a vast scale.*In terms of the global national capital, neither the expansion of the military, real estate or financial sectors of the economy is productive of surplus-value-the veritable life blood of the capitalist economy, without the constant expansion of which, its very existence becomes untenable. The fact that the recovery has been limited to the unproductive sectors of the economy, while the surplusvalue producing industrial base continues its decline, means not only that this recovery has been shallow in its scope, but must be short-lived in time as well. This is so because it is only the production of surplus-value from living labor in the productive sector of the economy that provides the basis to assure the accumulation of capital and to sustain the unproductive sector (however necessary this latter is to the overall functioning of the mode of production). In fact, the real estate boom and high tech industries have already run out of steam, as can be seen in the fact that already 25% of the office space in the sun belt cities of California and Texas are unoccupied, and in the sharp drop in profits for IBM, and the losses for Wang, Apple and Texas Instruments, this year. The military sector alone cannot sustain the American economy, quite apart from the growing difficulty of financing it as the productive sector of the economy

sinks into the abyss, without unleashing hyper-inflation.

The economic downturn that began in 1979-1980 has already confirmed the acceleration of a tendency which is dominant in the phase of state capitalism: the shift in the global division of surplus-value into profit on the one hand, and, interest and rent on the other in favor of the latter and at the expense of the former. Investment capital increasingly flees the productive sector, where surplus-value is generated, and finds refuge in activities which yield interest and rent. This historic shift, which has taken a huge leap forward over the past several years, is the conclusive proof of the absolute parasitism of state capitalism, of the increasingly unproductive-in value terms- nature of the capitalist mode of production in its senile phase. It also demonstrates the utter fiction of a durable economic recovery, which even in the very heart of the world capitalist economy (to which it has been confined), far from creating the bases for a new cycle of capital accumulation (however short-lived), has only produced a hypertrophy of the unproductive sector and thereby prepared the way for a new and more severe collapse.

With an horizon limited to the surface of capitalist society, with a perspective which sees only the appearance but not the essence of social reality, as is the case with the empirical social science of the bourgeoisie, the claim that the spectre of hyperinflation has been exorcised could seem to have a certain validity. The spectacular increase in the money supply and the concomitant rise in prices which characterized the 1970's, has given way over the past few years to a policy of tight money and relative price stability in the metropoles of the American bloc. Yet this turn of events in no way constitutes an elimination of the danger of hyper-inflation which continues to beset the capitalist world, and whose return in a more devastating form than in the late '70's is only a question of time. This is so because the dominant tendencies which preside over the course of capitalism in its decadent phase are themselves the fundamental cause of inflation, which no momentary shift in fiscal or monetary policy can change.

Inflation is the direct product of the change in the balance between productive and unproductive output in the capitalist economy, in favor of the latter. Thus, as the parasitism of the bloated state apparatus and in particular the war economy grows in the phase of state capitalism, inflation must result. This is so because in order to "pay" for the burgeoning unproductive output, the state

*In terms of the global national capital, because the output of these sectors does not return to the productive process as new constant or variable capital, it is sterilized, i.e., it leaves the cycle of production and cannot be valorized.

must increase the quantity of money in circulation faster than the growth of productive output. This creation of fictitious capital, necessary though it is for the survival of capitalism in its decadent phase, is but the other side of the coin to hyper-inflation. Certainly there are counter-tendencies to this dominant tendency towards hyper-inflation, even in the phase of state-capitalism. However, these counter-tendencies can only have a temporary effect, at best staving off the inflationary whirlwind which is generated by the very mechanism of capitalist survival in its permanent crisis. Among the counter-tendencies to inflation are: the recession itself; the reduction of the wages of the working class (including the 'social wage' paid directly by the state in the form of 'welfare', healthcare, social security etc.); reductions in the budget of the capitalist state in general; limitations on credits and loans; a fall in the prices of raw materials. Over the past 2 years, the metropoles of the American bloc have generally benefited from the operation of all these counter-tendencies at the same time (the exception being the US, where the budget deficit of the capitalist state has skyrocketed). It is these counter-tendencies which explain the momentary slackening of inflationary pressures.

In the case of the US, despite a budget deficit of over 200 billion dollars in 1985, inflation has still been kept at a low level. While the presence of the other counter-tendencies to inflation has helped in this respect, there is an additional factor which has made it possible for the American government to cover its budget deficit without recourse to the printing presses and the galloping inflation this would set-off. This is the massive flight of capital from all over the world to the US. While an important conjunctural cause of this flight of capital has certainly been the extremely high interest rates in America relative to Western Europe, this factor is itself being reversed as American interest rates sink. Nonetheless, it would be schematic to predict the imminent return of inflation in the US because of this, inasmuch as a more general cause operates to propel capital on its flight to America: in the face of global economic depression and the spread of wars and the growth of social upheavals which it spawns, only the US still constitutes a -relatively- safe haven for capital. Thus, capital will continue to flow to the US, even when interest rates drop. Moreover, the recent devaluation of the dollar will itself further accelerate this flight of capital to the US. By making Western European and Japanese goods less competitive on the American market (on which their fragile health

depends), and thereby producing a new economic downturn in Europe and Japan, the devaluation of the dollar will have the result of unleashing a new flight of capital to the US in the face of declining opportunities for profitable investment locally. This will once again temporarily provide the means for the US to cover a significant part of its enormous budget deficit without recourse to the printing presses. It is for this reason that the return of hyper-inflation can not be seen as imminent, despite the fact that, together with recession, it is the only future for capitalism in this period.

It might seem as if American capital would welcome inflation as a means to repay its vast debt in "cheap" dollars*. This might be the case were capitalism in this epoch still dominated by industrial capital, as in its ascendant phase. However, in decadent capitalism, where the claims of interest are more powerful than that of industrial profit, and where the stability of the monetary system - through which American imperialism dominates the world - takes precedence over the interests of even the most powerful industrial interests, a deliberate policy of inflation by the US is precluded. Given the potential for hyper-inflation to quickly provoke a complete economic collapse, a recourse to Keynesian monetary policies on a massive scale would be suicidal.

The difficulties facing Russian capitalism today are enormous. As the weaker of the two imperialist blocs, Russia and the countries within her orbit are hurt even more than the West by the onslaught of the economic crisis. Unable to compete economically with the countries of the American bloc, Russia has lost almost all markets outside of the economic zone, COMECON, where its military power guarantees its hegemony. Not only has there not been even a facade of a recovery in the Russian bloc over the past two years, but during the first six months of 1985 Russia's export earnings in the hard currencies of the West were down 23% from the same period in 1984. Plagued by a scarcity of capital with which to counteract the overwhelming economic superiority of its imperialist rival, excluded from the shrinking world market by the lack of competitiveness of its commodities, Russia finds it increasingly difficult to match the military buildup in the West, even while it is only the military route of conquest which provides any prospect whatsoever of preventing its economic extinction at the hands

*This seems to be the position of the ICC today.

of America. To that end the Russian ruling class is objectively forced to divert evermore of its capital to the production of armaments, despite the fact that the entire economy is already groaning under the crushing weight of the war economy. It is this situation which only presents in starker terms the dilemma faced by the capitalist class in every country, that dictates a new acceleration of the policy of brutal austerity and super-exploitation of the proletariat that characterizes capitalism in this period, and which

has been the leitmotiv of Russian "planning" for a decade. Gorbachev and the discipline-minded technocrats who are now occupying the leading positions in the Russian bureaucracy, are dedicating their expertise to one end: squeezing more surplus-value out of each worker, increasing the rate of surplus-value through speed-up, discipline and terror. Nonetheless, on the economic plane itself, whatever the outcome of this campaign, Russian capitalism is condemned to sink ever deeper into the morass of recession.

The Growth of Inter-imperialist Antagonisms and the Offensive of the American Bloc

Not even the considerable increase in the rate of exploitation which the capitalist class has imposed on the proletariat over the past several years through its policies of austerity and rationalization can solve the problems of a saturated world market, which condemns capitalism to a permanent crisis. At best, such policies can only improve the competitiveness of particular national capitals or imperialist blocs in the bitter struggle against their rivals. Similarly, the bankruptcy of Keynesianism and the efforts of capital to wean itself from the drug of credit so as to avert the collapse of the international monetary system cannot remove the spectre of hyper-inflation, which is a hallmark of state capitalism and the wareconomy.* Nonetheless, as Lenin pointed out there is no situation, however desperate, from which the capitalist class cannot seek to extricate itself. In short, for marxism, there can be no automatic collapse of the capitalist system as a result of even the most catastrophic economic crisis. Faced with such a perspective, decadent capitalism is inexorably led to take the path of inter-imperialist world war and the redivision of the world market. No matter that under present conditions the destructiveness of such an imperialist butchery would leave no possibility of a reconstruction; the logic of being caught in the vise of a catastrophic economic crisis, the ransom for the systems substantive irrationality, will be the recourse to world war.

The past few years, with the demonstration of the impossibility of a real economic recovery, have therefore been characterized by an incredible sharpening of the inter-imperialist antagonisms. Moreover, this same period has been dominated by a sustained offensive of the American bloc, aimed at pushing its Russian rival back into the Eurasian land mass that its armies occupied at the end of World War II.

In Africa, where during the late 1970's Russian imperialism, through the means of "national liberation struggles" and "popular revolution" gained a foothold in Mozambique, Angola and Ethiopia (thus compensating somewhat for its loss in Egypt), American imperialism has launched a counter-attack. The most important weapons in Washington's attempt to eject Russia from its footholds on the African continent are economic and military. The lure of American bloc economic and financial aid is leading Mozambique and Angola veering towards economic collapse - to turn to the West. To this must be added the utilization of "national liberation struggles" (once the preserve of Russian imperialism); Western backed guerilla movements in Angola and Mozambique have already forced these regimes into accomodation with American imperialism. In Ethiopia, less distant than Mozambique or Angola to Russian bases, the combination of the Western backed ELF and TLF in Eritrea and Tigre, and the necessity for Western "aid" in the face of economic collapse and famine, are also factors that the American bloc is using to move that country into its orbit.

In Asia too, American imperialism is today the principal backer of "national liberation struggles". In Afghanistan, Laos and Cambodia, American backed guerillas fight the local stalinist re-

*Though it seems clear that faced with the twin dangers of deep recession and hyper-inflation, the decisive sectors of world capital will choose a massive industrial downturn over the collapse of the monetary system by hyper-inflation.

gimes and their Russian and Vietnamese sponsors. While military success in these struggles is not now in the offing, the mere fact that large numbers of Russian troops are bogged down in Afghanistan, and that a very considerable part of the Vietnamese army must occupy Cambodia, limits the options for new offensive actions by the Russian bloc. The strengthening of the economic, political and military links between China and the U.S. also points up the success of the American offensive. The Sino-American nuclear pact is merely the latest in a series of steps by which China has become integrated into the American Bloc. Certainly, China is not so firmly a part of the American bloc as Western Europe or Japan. However, the tacit Sino-American alliance, based on the mutual interests of both Chinese and American capital in this period, is putting enormous pressure on Russia, compelling it to prepare to fight on 2 fronts and thereby limiting its diplomatic and military margin of maneuver as inter-imperialist antagonisms sharpen. The recent moves towards a rapprochement between North and South Korea must be seen as a spin-off to the Sino-American alliance, which - if it develops - will further strengthen American imperialism in the Far East.

In the Middle East, the conditions for a "pax Americana" have ripened over the past two years. Both Iraq (increasingly dependent on the pro-American regimes in Saudi Arabia and the gulf sheikdoms to wage its war with Iran) and Syria (which needs American consent if it is to dominate Lebanon and achieve its goal of a Greater Syria), have drawn closer to the American bloc. Russian imperialism is now left with only one undisputed foothold in the region: South Yemen, with its big Russians naval base at Aden. The extent to which Washington has successfully ejected Russia from the Mid East cockpit must not be obscured by the fact that the region remains a tinderbox.

The offensive of American imperialism can also be seen at the level of direct preparations to wage a world war (both conventional and nuclear). In Western Europe, the occupation of which could alone provide Russian imperialism with the economic basis to effectively challenge the U.S. on a global scale, the NATO alliance has been further consolidated. This can be seen both in the re-integration of France into the NATO military command structure and by the entrance of Spain into the "alliance" and the resulting modernization of its armed forces. In addition, the deployment of intermediate range missiles by the U.S. in Western Europe and the rapid development of cruise missile technology has increased the American bloc's preparations to wage a nuclear

war. The enormous growth and modernization of the U.S. fleet have outstripped Russian efforts to develop their naval power, and thus increases the advantage of the American bloc in waging a global conventional war. The development of special units for rapid intervention in local wars (and the "testing" of these units and their deployment in the interventions in Lebanon and Grenada) mark another extension in the global reach of an American imperialism being placed on a war footing. Finally, the development of "star wars" technology indicates the extent to which America is preparing to gain a first strike capability and thereby overturns the relative parity in nuclear capability that has characterized the two blocs since the late 1960's.

While the offensive of the American bloc is the dominant tendency in the development of inter-imperialist antagonisms, it would be schematic to think that this process does not encounter obstacles and counter-tendencies. These include counter-moves by Russian imperialism, obstacles thrown up by local imperialist rivalries within the American bloc itself, and difficulties arising from the interplay of all 3 moments in the international situation.

While in the medium term, the very success of the offensive of the American bloc must provoke desperate Russian counter-measures, for the moment these are still in the preparatory stages. Even now, however, Russian imperialism is seeking to re-enter the Mid-East cockpit, using its bases on the Red Sea (South Yemen, Ethiopia) and taking advantage of every obstacle encountered by the U.S. as it attempts to construct its Pax Americana in the Region. Similarly Russian imperialism is preparing to have its say in Iran the moment the regime of the Ayatollahs shows signs of crumbling. Russia is also searching for a modus vivendi with China, hoping to relieve the danger in the Far East as it prepares to confront the American bloc in the decisive European theatre. Moreover, utilizing its stronghold in Vietnam, Russian imperialism is also extending aid to the NPA in the Philippines, trying to undermine the stability of American imperialism in the Pacific. While the Philippines remains firmly under U.S. control (with both the Marcos regime and the democratic opposition firmly committed to Washington), the Pacific remains an area of direct confrontation between the blocs and any instability in the region will be utilized by Moscow.

Despite the ejection of Russian imperialism from most of its footholds in the

Middle East, the way to a Pax Americana in the region is also blocked by the intense rivalries between the local national capitals. Thus, if Egypt and Israel are both solidly in the American bloc, and Syria and Iraq are increasingly drawn into the web of American imperialism, the bitter rivalries between these states for local dominance constitutes a real obstacle to the consolidations of American power in the area. If, in the long run the interests of the U.S. (barring a Russian counter-offensive) must prevail, in the short run these conflicts are a formidable obstacle with which Washington must contend.

While the offensive of American imperialism must deal with local imperialist rivalries in the Middle-East, the situation in South Africa illustrates the complex interaction between all 3 levels of the international situation (economic crisis, imperialist antagonisms and class struggle) in creating an extremely volatile situation in a country which is strategically vital to the U.S. The key to understanding the present turmoil in South Africa is the descent of that country's economy into its most severe economic crisis since 1929. It is this which has created the objective situation in which a massive wave of proleta-

rian class struggle (and social revolt) has been unleashed. The divisions within the local ruling class over how to deal with this situation add to the possibility of a loss of control, which will jeopardize the smooth functioning of the mining economy and undermine the strategic interests of the American bloc. The incipient Black ruling class around the ANC presses for "one man, one vote" as the only way to assure order and stability (under its leadership). The financial and mining sectors, closely tied to the big British and American banks, seeks an end to apartheid in order to "buy time" for their local economic domination to continue. The Afrikaner ruling class, which controls the huge state sector of the economy and the repressive apparatus, hesitates to make the necessary changes -despite American pressure- because of its fear of losing its base in the mass of the white population and provoking a "backlash". Such a volatile situation, while it will probably be contained by the American bloc, nonetheless clearly presents real dangers to U.S. imperialism in the short run (particularly with respect to its efforts to re-integrate Angola and Mozambique in the bloc, which depend on a stable South African regime).

The Class Struggle

If world war is the outcome to which the logic of open capitalist economic crisis and the intensification of inter-imperialist antagonisms drives in the epoch of permanent crisis, the actual outbreak of the imperialist butchery is dependent on one other condition: the ideological and/or physical defeat of the working class and its mobilization for war by the capitalist state. It is this necessary condition which is lacking in the present period of open economic crisis which began at the end of the 1960's. In the face of a proletariat which greeted the crisis with a struggle on its own class terrain, the inter-imperialist antagonisms-though they become ever sharper- cannot find their outlet in world war.

The past 2 years have seen the steady development of the third wave of class struggle since the historic resurgence of the proletariat at the end of the 60's. Beginning with the strikes by the Charleroi railway workers in Belgium in 1983, which were quickly spread to the whole of the public sector (crossing the linguistic "frontier" which Belgian capital utilizes to divide the working class), this wave has continued to swell, and its peak is still nowhere in sight.

The high-points of this wave have been the efforts-embryonic though they were-of dockers and miners to link their struggles in July-August 1984 at the height of the coal miners strike in Britain (which held out the possibility of breaking through the isolation that the unions and base unionists had successfully imposed on that struggle, and which finally led to its defeat in the Winter of 1985) and the massive strike wave which paralyzed Denmark in March-April 1985.

The present wave of class struggle is characterized by a number of important factors which indicate -beyond the considerable difficulties which capitalism experiences in containing it- that it has a direction which clearly indicates a real shift in the rapport de forces between the proletariat and capital at an historic level. This wave has been characterized by a pronounced tendency towards the outbreak of spontaneous movements, which at the outset proceed outside the control of the unions. Indeed, the trade union apparatus on which capitalism depends to control the working class is increasingly hard pressed to regain control of these struggles. More and more, as in Denmark,

capitalism has had to utilize base unionism in order to finally contain the struggle. A second feature of the present wave is the growing simultaneity of struggles both at a national and even international level. Not only does this reflect the unification of the conditions of austerity, rationalization and unemployment which the proletariat faces on an international scale, but it also constitutes the objective basis and necessary conditions for the conscious extension of class struggle in the future. Finally, this wave is also characterized by a slow but indisputable maturity of consciousness within the broad layers of the working class. This maturity of consciousness can be seen in the growing distrust of the unions, in the increasing recognition that sacrifices today will not lead to better conditions in the future; in the growing awareness that the only possible response to new bouts of austerity is struggle; and in the understanding that unemployment is the future for ever larger numbers of workers if there is no struggle.

However, these characteristics, which indicate a real development in the struggle, must not obscure the limitations to the present wave thus far, and lead either to a fatalistic triumphalism or a voluntaristic view that the only thing now lacking is the leadership of a revolutionary organization. With a few notable exceptions, the present wave has not yet seen a conscious extension of the struggle from one sector of the proletariat to another. The major examples of such extension -which are certainly significant- are the efforts made by workers to extend the miners strike to the docks in Britain in the summer of 1984, and the massive strikes in Denmark last March. Extension has as its condition the self-organization of the class and its capacity to break out of the union prison. But the present wave of struggle has not been characterized by self-organization. The formation of mass general assemblies and elected and revocable strike committees, outside or against the unions, which is the hallmark of self-organization, and is the very basis for a conscious extension of the struggle, has thus far been prevented. (The major example of the inability of the unions to completely block the moves towards self-organization is the strike in the Barcelona post office, where the workers held mass general assemblies and elected a strike committee on which the union was given only a fixed number of places.) Nor has the present wave yet seen a genuine politicization of the struggles. Politicization, which is the establishment of a favorable rapport de force in relation to the capitalist state is in-

tegrally linked to extension and self-organization on the one hand, and to a more thoroughgoing maturation of consciousness on the other. It is these very tasks which face the proletariat today, and in which the clear intervention of revolutionaries must play a vital role.

If revolutionaries must guard against triumphalism and voluntarism in their evaluation of the class struggle, they must also be able to recognize the real though slow- development which has taken place in the third wave. There are several important aspects to this profound development. First, even when big struggles end there is no longer a period of inaction : the struggle tends to scatter into tiny streams and rivelets, which contain the potential for a later convergence. The small strikes, too, are a manifestation of the slow but real maturation of consciousness taking place in the class. Second, even in those countries where the level of open struggle has been low (such as France and Italy) there has been a significant desertion from the unions, which if it has not yet seriously weakened the capacity of the unions to control the struggles which erupt, is nonetheless a sign of the growing recognition that the unions cannot defend the interests of the working class. Third, direct appeals to the unemployed have been an increasing feature of strike movements, presaging the future unification of the proletariat, as have the formation of unemployed committees. While many of these are organized by the left and leftists, others constitute the terrain where a real process of political discussion and maturation of consciousness occurs. Finally, there has been a growing and open opposition on the part of the most militant workers to the attempts to politically demobilize the class through union "mobilizations" (one hour or one day strikes, days of action, union marches). This has even taken the form of the refusal of militant workers to be dragooned into participating in union led marches which do not correspond to ongoing struggles and the militancy of the class (with the real potential to be turned into class action), but to the efforts of capital to demobilize the proletariat.

The ICC, who calls on the workers to participate in these kinds of demonstrations "to transform them into real class actions", is going directly against this aspect of developing class consciousness today (for a development of this point, see "critique of the intervention of the ICC" in this issue).

If these phenomena are so significant it's because they express a movement

towards questioning the instruments used by the bourgeoisie to control, deviate and break proletarian struggle. Since the end of the '70's, the dominant trend in the bourgeoisie was to follow a policy of favoring the rightwing in government and the left in opposition. The emergence of a 3rd wave of class struggle means that the left in opposition has not been enough to paralyze the proletariat. For more than 2 years, the proletariat has been going through the difficult experience of concrete union sabotage of struggles. Unions isolate struggles on a sectoral, corporatist and localist terrain, break the unity of the working class by dividing the workers by federation, job category, different regions and countries; doing everything to prevent a real extension and self-organization of struggles by organizing phony extensions (like in Belgium in 1983), by heading off workers' initiatives and calling dead-end "actions" that demobilize the workers, etc. By repeated confrontations with all these maneuvers, the proletariat will be able to learn how to spread and unify its struggles.

The slow pace of the development of class struggle today is determined by the fact that the proletariat has to repeatedly go through these experiences in many different places in the world. It would be a grave error to believe that any one experience has taught the workers "the lesson" and need not be repeated. Thus, while the outbreak of the massive strikes in Denmark last March clearly demonstrated that the defeat of the miners in Britain had not marked an historic or even conjunctural defeat for the world proletariat, it would be a serious mistake to believe that the working class had already drawn the "lessons" of Great Britain.* Such a view not only indicates a voluntarist impatience with the still slow process of class struggle and a tendency to see the third wave as a linear development towards a proletarian offensive; it also demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of the very nature of class consciousness and the process of its development. It is no less critical that revolutionaries grasp the fact that if the capitalist class has not unveiled any new ideological mystifications or political weapons thus far in the third wave, this is not because it doesn't have any or has reached its limit, but because in the present circumstances it doesn't need any in order to maintain sufficient control over events to impose brutal

austerity. Such an underestimation of the ideological capabilities of the capitalist state is but the other side of the coin of a fetishization of the third wave and the failure to understand the fact that the struggle of the proletariat in this period does not proceed in a linear fashion.

The fate of humanity today depends on the development of proletarian class consciousness. It is only the proletarian struggle in the face of the incredible deepening of the economic crisis and the sharpening of inter-imperialist antagonisms that prevents the unleashing of a generalized war. If world capital succeeds in inflicting an historic defeat on the working class, and ideologically mobilizing it for war, there will be nothing to prevent the holocaust. The still tortuous path of the development of proletarian class consciousness, and the communist revolution, requires the active intervention of revolutionary organizations armed with the marxist method and capable of developing the revolutionary theory without which there can be no revolutionary practice. If the defeat of the proletariat and the muzzling of its class consciousness can lead to the extinction of the human species, the capitulation to abstraction and schematism on the part of the revolutionary organization guarantees the extinction of that organization as a vital factor in the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat. A clear analysis of the international situation, of the dialectical interaction of its 3 principal moments, of the mediations through which the general tendencies inscribed in social reality work themselves out, is the pre-condition for the intervention of revolutionaries.

APPEAL TO READERS

We intend to make this magazine an instrument of political clarification and understanding of the situation today. We also need to have the tools necessary for direct intervention in the class struggle (leaflets, posters, newspapers). Our limited material resources and our small number makes this task very difficult. We appeal to our readers to help circulate Internationalist Perspective and to carry on political discussion with us. We ask you to subscribe to our magazine and to show a practical support for our efforts by giving a contribution if you can.

* as the ICC claimed in International Review #42 .

THE DECLINE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST CURRENT

Most of the comrades who have constituted the external fraction of the International Communist Current were at the very basis of the constitution of the ICC in 1975. All have been active militants for many years, making important contributions, with all their militant will and with a revolutionary commitment which has never wavered, to its slow and uneven construction. It is therefore not with a light heart that we have been led -after 2 years of extremely painful struggle within the ICC against its 'new political orientations' which has been climaxed by our de facto exclusion- to diagnose the degeneration of a group which was so essential in the revolutionary milieu and which fulfilled a fundamental task within the class struggle.

The text which follows has as its goal the fullest clarification of what has provoked and accelerated this degeneration. In this way, the meaning and importance of the struggle waged by us against this dynamic of regression, which proved to be more and more irreversible over a period of time, will be clear. In order to make this debate,

whose twists and turns were often tortuous, comprehensible to the reader, the text will be limited to indicating the essentials, the key moments, the definitive turns. This is all the more important inasmuch as the ICC has allowed practically none of this to filter through during the last 2 years, and there is an urgent need to break this wall of silence, without going into all of the details. Despite the lack of fraternal spirit which has prevailed since the beginning of the discussion on the divergencies which arose 2 years ago, despite the sordid organizational practices at certain moments and the poisoned atmosphere which -in a general fashion- resulted in the ICC, this text does not seek to settle accounts nor to fall into a shallow polemic. Rather, for the whole of the working class, it will try to draw the lessons of a painful experience, so as to spare it in the future (as much as possible) these types of errors and the waste of its revolutionary forces. We will come back regularly in our publication to the critique of the ICC. This text is a first shot.

The General Conditions of the Period

The general renewal of proletarian struggle around 15 years ago in the face of the reappearance of the economic crisis (the famous French May '68, the Italian hot autumn, etc.), and the waves of struggle since, have put an end to the long counter-revolution which capped the defeat of the first revolutionary wave. This opened a new period in the history of the decadence of capitalism. It made clear that the dominant tendency of the epoch in which we are living, is towards decisive class confrontations. Their outcome, and whether or not the working class is victorious through the world communist revolution, will decide the fate of humanity by posing the alternative: socialism and the development of society towards the satisfaction of human needs or barbarism and the infernal logic of destruction engendered by an economic system in total breakdown.

The intact and growing character of the enormous combativity of the workers, the slow but sure maturation of class consciousness, which constitutes the long process through which the proletariat becomes conscious of its nature as an exploited and revolutionary class, of the possibility and necessity for it to destroy capitalism, have been the key factors in understanding the rapport de force between the bourgeoisie and the working class as it has developed since the end of the '60's. The last two years, by the important renewal of workers' struggles that they have seen, after the relative disorientation due to the defeat of the Polish workers, have eloquently confirmed the determination of the workers not to allow themselves to be swept into the disgusting spiral of capitalism: both in the heart of capita-

lism and on its periphery, significant class battles have involved ever larger masses of workers, pressured by the effects of the economic crisis (USA, Belgium, the Netherlands, England, the Scandinavian countries, Germany, Spain, Latin America, Africa).

The fact that, unlike the first revolutionary wave which exploded in an unexpected fashion in the midst of an imperialist butchery, the present proletarian dynamic is developing in the objective condition of a slow descent of capitalism into the abyss of the crisis is critical if we are to grasp its main features. These are, first, a slow and jerky development with brusque advances and retreats. Second, the greater preparation of the bourgeoisie in the development of all its possible and imaginable mystifications so as to try to break the process of the development of class consciousness by the proletariat and to prevent it from overturning capitalist class power. In this sense, it is essentially the left factions of the bourgeoisie, almost everywhere in the opposition, and their several trade union structures (which span all the degrees of "radicalness"), which have the function of systematically draining and emptying of their revolutionary content the potential for the proletariat contained in the present situation.

The most correct and precise possible understanding of this whole process of class struggle is vital for the revolutionary minorities which are an essential part of it by first and foremost articulating the general, historic, goals of the workers' struggle. Such an understanding is the first condition for an effective intervention by revolutionaries in all the social upheavals if they really want to contribute to the ripening of the movement, and to push it forward. This understanding, first of all involves the necessary clarification of what is the process of unification and organization of the proletariat seen from a global point of view-and this in the general, objective, context described above. What is the road towards massive self-organization, and therefore towards the political affirmation of the proletariat? In such a process, how do revolutionary minorities intervene and deploy themselves? As a consequence of this, what is the process by which the class party of tomorrow will be built and what is its specific function in the development of class consciousness?

These are the key questions to which the revolutionary forces which -in a still weak state- exist today must respond by constantly going over them, in the light of the experience of the past. In a new

historical situation (slow ripening of class consciousness in a context of economic crisis), new questions arise. And there is no ready made answer to which we can turn. Only a constant effort to continually nourish revolutionary theory can arm the communist minorities by providing them with the bases for the most conscious and the clearest possible action within the class struggle.

The very real maturation of the proletarian struggle since the end of the '70's throws up a permanent challenge to communist minorities by demanding that they be constantly on top of the situation. The chronic insufficiencies and weakness of the proletarian political milieu, expressing the existence of a profound crisis within it, shows how poorly this challenge has been met. In fact, the proletarian political milieu has shown itself incapable of inscribing itself positively in the evolution and acceleration of the class struggle. Most of the groups claiming the heritage of the communist left of the '20's, which had survived- even at the price of sclerosis- the long period of counter-revolution, have not, by contrast, withstood the jolts produced by the reawakening of the working class and have often simply disappeared into thin air. From Bordigism (ICP) to councilism, it is whole sections of the revolutionary milieu which have systematically collapsed since the reappearance of the world crisis of capitalism, as a result of their incapacity to understand the process of the development of consciousness, and the function that they had to play in it. Chronic political confusions, organizational dispersion, splits, all in a general atmosphere of sectarianism- here is the sad reality of this milieu, which, in addition, in the name of the so-called truth held by each of them, even refused to recognize and to acknowledge this lamentable situation.

The basis cause of this weakness resides in two factors. First, in a longstanding incapacity to develop and complete the critique of the experience of the working class in the first revolutionary wave (the Russian and German revolution, 1917-1923) and of the policy that the Communist International defended. This latter was a policy which in large measure contributed to the defeat of this wave (on the trade union, parliamentary, national question, etc, the question of the party) despite the gain in consciousness that the CI represented. Most of the revolutionary groups defended just those positions which had already cost the working class so dearly, a fact which expressed itself by an inadequacy of their political program with respect to the general conditions

of proletarian struggle in the period of decadence and by their being inevitably swept from the historical scene. The second factor in the weakness of the revolutionary milieu resides in its incapacity to understand the real stakes in the present period: a long and difficult process of class struggle with periods of advance and retreat for the working class, demanding of revolutionaries that they fall into neither the situation of an academic spectator of events, nor infantile impatience and activism, the consequence of which is always to undermine class principles by opening the door to the penetration of bourgeois ideology and degeneration.

The breakup of the International Conferences of the Communist Left at the beginning of the '80's, their sabotage by the Bordigist wing of the proletarian milieu (CWO, Battaglia Comunista) was, for the working class, one of the most harmful expressions of these general deficiencies. The halt in the important effort that they represented, and consequently the disappearance of a vital framework for discussions, confrontations, deepening and working out of revolutionary positions could only heighten the reigning confusion by cutting off any possibility for political clarification.

In this context of general confusion in the proletarian milieu, the ICC (which was founded 10 years ago) was capable of constituting a beacon, a pole of regroupment for all the revolutionary elements that the historic renewal of proletarian struggle had generated, and for the whole of the working class. Its fundamental analysis of the opening-at the end of the '60's- of an historic course towards decisive class confrontation made it possible, at the outset, for it to understand and to concretize the basis points demanded by such a situation.

These included : "the necessity to base revolutionary activity on the past acquisitions of the class, on the experience of previous communist organizations, to see the present organization as a link in a chain of past and future organizations of the class; the necessity to see communist positions and analyses not as dead dogma but as a living programme which is constantly being enriched and deepened; the necessity to be armed with a clear and solid conception of the revolutionary organization, of its structure and its function within the class." ("Ten Years of the ICC", International Review #40)

This general political clarity made it possible for the ICC to be a very im-

portant instrument contributing to the development of class consciousness. Its political platform, the clearest expression up to this time of the lessons drawn from the history of the workers movement, its international centralization, its non-monolithic vision of the revolutionary organization, made it possible for it to be a real locus for the political life of the proletariat, which could represent a considerable step forward on the long road which will lead to the creation of the class party of tomorrow.

However, like the rest of the revolutionary milieu, the ICC has not been spared significant jolts throughout its history. This phenomenon is an expression of the fact that political clarity -- however great it is at a particular time -- is never definitively assured. The only guarantee against the possible degeneration of a proletarian organization resides in the constant effort at greater consciousness, in the steady militant will to make this live, and not to be content with what seems already "secured". The least slackening in this consciousness and this will power is a mortal threat.

Above all, it was the upsurge in struggles at the end of the 70's that would reveal dangerous insufficiencies in the ICC. "The ICC, which was formed in 1975 during the period of temporary reflux, has often believed that when the struggle picked up again, all our problems would disappear in the general enthusiasm. Now we understand that this isn't the case - that this was a childish view of the ordeals history has in store. In general, the idea of expanding our intervention was too often seen as a green light to localist and immediatist tendencies, to the detriment of our international unity. We tended to overestimate the possibilities of getting an immediate echo in the class, of overestimating strikes which were only a prelude to more decisive confrontations". ("The Present Convulsions in the Revolutionary Milieu", International Review #28)

Immediatism, activism, localism, federalism, leftism, slidings on principles (unions, general conception of the role of revolutionaries): it is this ensemble of political and organizational deficiencies that already characterized a good part of the activity of the ICC in that important wave of struggles and would provoke a serious internal crisis in 81. To fully grasp these weaknesses, to try to find their roots so as to remedy them, an Extraordinary Conference was convoked whose basic focus was the deepest possible re-examination of the role of revolutionaries in the general context of workers' struggles in the period of decadence. This Conference, which expressed a real concern to critically sift

all the political failings of the ICC, put the accent on the need for a theoretical deepening by the whole of the organization and the need to methodically carry out political discussion on the danger of immediatism in a period of rising struggles.

A certain political and organizational rectification did take place after this Conference, but one conceived as basically a tightening of the ranks, a "loyalty to the organization" at a superficial level that rendered it totally insufficient. In spite of the preparation of a text on the party for the 5th Congress of the ICC, which was moreover neither the result of a real deepening on this position in the whole organization, nor the expression of a real theoretical advance, the necessary tasks which were decided on at the Conference were addressed more at the level of words than in practice.

Discussion on the party had already been sabotaged in the revolutionary mi-

lieu by the breakup of the International Conferences and was increasingly neglected by the ICC at the very moment that it became more and more indispensable. It is, therefore, not by chance that this crucial discussion was at the heart of important regressions on the question of class consciousness, "councilism the greatest danger", centrism and the functioning of the organization. The extent and the acceleration of these regressions would sound the death knell of the ICC and lead to the de facto expulsion of the tendency.

In the rest of this article we are going to analyze the process and the stages of this degeneration and of our struggle against it. Deepening the political questions themselves is not the aim of this article which simply intends to give a general view of these problems. But we refer the reader to other texts in this issue devoted to a deeper examination of the specific political questions.

The new Political Orientations of the ICC: Moving towards the Void

As we have seen, the whole proletarian milieu has been marked by a sometimes insurmountable and fatal inability to recognize the present dynamic of the development of class consciousness and its function in this movement. In this respect, the year 1983 was a new test for the ICC which floundered in political confusions it was not then able to overcome. It is true that the ICC had been the only revolutionary organization at the beginning of the 80's to be able to grasp the characteristics of the mass strike in Poland and all the questions raised by it. But, like the rest of the revolutionary milieu, it experienced great difficulty in seeing the meaning of the "post-Poland" period. What kind of defeat for the international proletariat did the regaining of control by the Polish bourgeoisie (seconded by its colleagues in the whole world) represent? When and how would the next class battles arise? From the point of view of consciousness, what was actually happening between moments of open social explosion? How should revolutionary organizations conceive of their general activity in such a context? These were the problems that proved so difficult to resolve. What had always been lacking in the ICC was the application and the development of the marxist method which alone allows revolutionaries to grasp social reality as a totality and in the movement of its being. The ICC would now begin to pay dearly for it at this point in the debate.

The wide range of responses given to

the questions cited above are themselves revealing. First, the rejection of the very notion of defeat (or its considerable under-estimation) after the coup d'etat which put an end to the mass strike in Poland. That already marked a difficulty in analyzing the way general potentialities contained in the historic course (a course towards class confrontation) were concretized at each moment in the social process. This error also expressed a mechanistic vision of the proletarian struggle, conceived as a linear, gradual movement in constant progression and not, more correctly, as the materialization of a rapport de forces, marked by phases of advance and retreat in the consciousness of the workers as well as by a growing sophistication in the mystifications used by the bourgeoisie to stifle the development of this consciousness. Second, an incapacity to understand moments of downturn or pause in the workers' struggle, to see what stage of the struggle they represented. This is the way that conceptions such as the absence of a "subterranean maturation" of class consciousness between phases of open struggle, or the opposite conception, which put a subterranean maturation on so high a level that the next upheaval would have to express a spectacular "qualitative leap" as a pre-requisite for the development of new class battles after the Polish defeat, saw the light of day in the reigning confusion -- without real method in the discussion and without a clear political orientation to effectively fight them.

While it was in this state of profound incoherence, with shortcomings in its analysis of the historic course, the ICC was confronted by a real acceleration of the historic course through a renewal of the proletarian struggle at the end of 1983. Massive movements in Belgium and the Netherlands would be followed by important expressions of combativity everywhere in the world in the months which followed. Poorly armed to appreciate this new moment in the rapport de forces between the classes, the ICC had great difficulty raising itself to the level that this acceleration of events imposed on it : the theoretical analysis of what this represented and the perspectives it opened; a maximum of political clarity on the tasks to be accomplished as a revolutionary minority conceived as an integral part of the movement itself; the appropriate way to intervene.

In this general context of weakness for the organization, a comrade of the ICC wrote a text which had as its goal to put the organization back on the right track by providing the theoretical framework for understanding -- among others -- the question of the "subterranean maturation" of class consciousness. A part of this text (which in other respects was based on a correct and necessary refutation of a conception defended by a comrade of the ICC who saw immediate and open struggle as "the only crucible for the development of class consciousness") would later be included in a Resolution on the International Situation coming from the central organ of the ICC : "Even if they are part of the same whole and interact with each other, it would be wrong to identify 'class consciousness' with 'consciousness of the class', that is, its extension at a given moment. The latter proceeds from a large number of general and historical factors as well as immediate and contingent ones, particularly the development of struggles. The former, on the other hand, is self-knowledge not only in the present, in the immediate existence of the class but in terms of its future becoming. The conditions for coming to consciousness are created by the historical existence of the class, capable of understanding its future and not by immediate and contingent struggles"...."

For the first time in its history and in a clear break with its coherence on the question of class consciousness developed in the pamphlet "Communist Organizations and Class Consciousness", an official position of the ICC included, next to correct concepts, notions that the organization had always vehemently fought: a cut and dried differentiation between class consciousness and consciousness of the class and an erroneous relation between them. The introduction of these conceptions was part of

the absence of any real method in discussion. This situation has prevailed in the ICC for quite a time and the organization tried to mitigate it by resorting to the method of "twists and turns" -- fighting one "evil" by another "evil" which itself had been previously fought. Thus, to resist what it had stigmatized as a "councilist aberration", ie, the idea put forward of an absence of subterranean maturation of consciousness (because this idea denied the activity of the revolutionary minority), the ICC resorted to arguments having obvious Leninist overtones. The later explanations given by the majority of the ICC to better define what the idea of class consciousness/consciousness of the class meant (explanations which, moreover, would reveal an enormous heterogeneity of thought and a wide range of very disparate opinions on the question) would at least have the "merit" -- in their errors -- of all amplifying the Leninist overtones. These explanations included the identification of class consciousness with the communist program, with revolutionary theory, as the property of the revolutionary organization ; the development of the general consciousness of the proletariat seen as a process of the progressive assimilation of the program by the proletariat, whose consciousness in its turn could be characterized as no more than "centrist".*

As we will explain in more detail in the next part of this text dealing with the evolution of the opposition within the ICC and the means used by the organization to control divergences, a considerable number of militants had reservations or open disagreements on this point of the Resolution. Contrary to the sick insinuations which would follow of a supposed rejection by the "reservists" (as the comrades having divergences would be scornfully designated) of the general orientations of the ICC on the international situation -- and this was a first step towards discrediting them -- or a refusal on their part to criticize the "councilist" confusions on the subterranean maturation mentioned earlier (which most of these comrades had rejected at the time), these reservations expressed something completely different. First, the refusal to leave the door open, via ambiguous formulations, to a Leninist-Bordigist vision of class consciousness. Second, the need for an in-depth clarification, avoiding all disastrous shortcuts, on the new questions raised by the present process of class struggle. But the witch hunt was on. The

*We will elaborate on the meaning of this new slight of hand utilized by the ICC later in this text, but it is already clear that we are not very far from the "trade union consciousness" so dear to Lenin and formerly so vilified by the latter-day councilist hunters of the ICC.

ICC was already no longer capable of carrying on a fair and honest debate. That is why its majority, under the impetus of the central organ, set the steamroller in motion seeking to crush any resistance.

The very practice of organizational centralization, which proceeds from a real necessity for the revolutionary organization, would degenerate more and more, progressively limiting itself to a tail-ending of the central organ. This would be expressed in an impressive succession of votes without real discussion, at an ever faster rate, and as a simple ratification of the new orientations defended by the central organ.

A new text written by the same comrade as the one cited above was supposed to give the new line to militants who did not quite know what to make of all this. It gave a pseudo-“politico-theoretical” framework justifying the hunt for “reservists” and, above all, the de facto monolithism which was established in the ICC. In reality, rather than a debate such as must take place among revolutionaries, and the need for which the ICC now only paid lip service, what took place was a shallow polemic directed against those who didn’t swallow this as gospel, and who were opposed to the obvious confusions of a point in a Resolution. That text which was, almost as fast as it was written, considered a magic potion to cure the ICC of all evils, developed a new “theory”: the theory of “centrism” and “opportunism”. This theory was supposed to be the key to the understanding of all the weaknesses – past, present and future – of the ICC. But this famous new “framework” had only one extraordinary thing about it : it covered an immense void. Although the notion of “opportunism” was used in an informal way in its polemic with the revolutionary milieu, in a whole series of theoretical texts published by the ICC in its press*, these notions of opportunism and centrism were clearly denounced as no longer applicable to the workers’ movement in the period of decadence and therefore to be considered as part of the whole arsenal of leftist mystifications. If a certain ambiguity existed in the ICC on this question, it was to be heightened to an outrageous degree by decreeing -- without any explanation or argumentation -- that the danger of centrism was its new political orientation. In this way, the ICC brought into its ranks a poison which would wreak incalculable havoc.

But this is not what is most disturbing. Rather, let us listen to our redeem-

* International Review #2, the pamphlet “Rupture avec le Trotskyisme”, study texts on “The First Four Congresses of the Communist International”, texts on the German Revolution in International Review #3 and Internationalisme n°60

er speak: “Opportunism is characterized not only by what it says, but rather – and perhaps still more – by what it does not say, by what it will say tomorrow when circumstances appear more favorable to it, more propitious. The opportunity that it seeks often dictates that it remain silent today. If it acts in this way, it is not so much by conscious will, by a machiavellian spirit, but because such behavior is part of its very nature; indeed, it constitutes the very foundation of its nature....Opportunism does not openly proclaim its identity...it hates to show itself as it really is... it prefers to hide in the shadows. Centrism is one of opportunism’s many shapes, one of its facets. Centrism expresses a characteristic aspect of opportunism by always situating itself in the middle, between openly reactionary social forces and the radical forces fighting against the existing social order...” This was only the first chapter of a despicable collection which would rapidly grow into a series of “fundamental political contributions to the revolutionary movement”, all of the same ilk : centrism, outside of any objective and historical context, comes first of all from the domain of psychology, from behavior, from a certain type of hesitant, not sufficiently convinced, militant. According to the ICC, centrism became the AIDS of the workers’ movement. Therefore, there was no political response to comrades with minority positions but just an indictment denouncing all hesitation (to the defenders of the concept of centrism, the word “hesitation” just means any critical spirit, any questioning). This indictment was the basis for the definitive condemnation not just of the “reservists” of today but of all those to come.

Our text in this issue, “Resolution on Centrism and the Political Organization of the Proletariat”, is the end point of the untiring critique made by us, within the ICC, of this new orientation. We urge you to read it.

But from our first text, we sounded the alarm, warning the organization against the inevitable political regression that this orientation on centrism would provoke. This negative dynamic was only accelerated by the fact that at the very time that the weakened state of the organization demanded a real deepening on the questions raised by the present period, the way to such a debate was solidly barred by the very conception of centrism. This negative momentum continued and unfortunately, our predictions of inevitable political regression increasingly came true. This new orientation on centrism destroyed whole sections of the political foundation of the ICC. In expanding its new orientation on centrism, the ICC was led to discover what it would

more and more come to theorize as the evil of the century : centrism in relation to councilism. All of a sudden, for the needs of the cause, councilism * became the greatest danger for the working class and its revolutionary minorities. This great discovery, like all the others, did not fail to provoke a hail of new theoretical ravages. First, it was asserted that it was the ICC which was consumed by councilism as the greatest danger. Afterward, this concept was extended to the whole revolutionary milieu. Then, the ICC decreed that the entire working class of the central countries of capitalism was most dangerously threatened by councilism in a period of rising struggle because of "its fear of politics", which was itself the product of all the conditions - objective and subjective - created by the decadence of capitalism. Yet, on the other hand, the danger of substitutionism was specifically reserved for the working class of the backward countries and was therefore a "lesser evil". Finally, it was necessary to close the circle by revising the very history of the workers' movement : anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism became councilism/19th century style. It was the innate councilism of the German proletariat and revolutionaries (on which the healthy bolshevik spirit had unfortunately not descended) which was the essential factor in the defeat of the first revolutionary wave.

The same grotesque alchemy was applied to the overall notion of centrism. As we have already said, at first it was the ICC itself which had to pay the price : any hesitation within its ranks (and here the hobby horse was hesitation in relation to intervention) was a manifestation of centrism. By going to ridiculous extremes in all ying this framework to all aspects of its activity, the ICC banged its head against a stone wall ...but of course could never admit it. Then, all of the programmatic weaknesses of the revolutionary milieu (the trade union and national questions) were attributed to cen-

trism, which opened the door to the theorization of a centrist position on class lines (a conception which had already been applied in the International Review #43 to the position of Battaglia Comunista on electoralism and the trade union question). The ICC would end up talking about the congenital centrism of the consciousness of the proletariat. The whole process of the development of consciousness by the proletariat would come down to no more than a process of progressively breaking with the centrism corrupting it. Once again, history itself was rewritten : the Social Democratic Parties were declared to have been centrist until the 1920's; counter-revolutionary parties such as the USPD, whole factions of the bourgeoisie, passed back into the workers' camp thanks to this brilliant tool of centrism. Such groups were now said to have been in the camp of the working class on the grounds that they were organized expressions of the centrist state of consciousness of the proletariat or because certain revolutionaries of the time characterized them as centrist and for that reason delayed breaking with them. The same about-face occurred concerning the stalinists in the 30's and Trotskyism.

Always, in the face of our systematic opposition to each of these regressions, the ICC insisted that it would never take the next step : "No, no, we'll never go that far"...this was the constant refrain they threw in our faces. But, it successively fell into each one of these traps and we can now say that all this has destroyed it.

If the degeneration of the ICC was originally seen at the level of principles and its organizational functioning, later and inevitably, it was its very practice within the working class which underwent significant regressions. As a minority, we systematically fought these regressions in the intervention of the ICC. We are publishing a text on this question in this issue.

Our Struggle Within the ICC

It is impossible, because of lack of space, to provide a detailed chronology here of our political struggle against the degeneration of the ICC. However, it is essential to point out that, in spite of the constant assertions of the ICC on the shady character of the tendency formed by the comrades with minority positions, on our so-called failure to contribute to the debate, which supposedly proved the emptiness of our thought, and in spite of the

* Apart from ridiculous simplifications, the ICC didn't really bother to develop a conception of the political content, the several variants or the historical evolution of councilism, the collapse of which it had analyzed only a few years before.

enormous resistance of the ICC to publishing this debate in its external press, we wrote dozens of contributions : theoretical texts, counter-resolutions for important meetings in the organization, numerous position papers, etc. Suffice it to say that we fought untiringly for more than a year and a half.

Again, because of considerations of space, we cannot detail the whole panoply of political and organizational manoeuvres which the ICC used to repudiate and crush this resistance : personal attacks of all sorts, slander, suspicion, tactics of division and demoralization, disciplinary measures, censure; the list could be extended to a wide range of actions typical of an organization in which the absence of

a real political life can only lead to its corruption. However, if there is a short way to summarize what happened in the ICC, it would be that the organization announced a new orientation, accepted it virtually unanimously and only then discussed it, while each time closing the debate.

When reality itself approaches such a caricature, it is neither the result of chance, nor a simple accident along the way. According to its own texts and activities reports, the ICC has always suffered from a lack of theoretical formation, from agreement without real conviction, from tail-ending or suivism, as well as recourse to the most experienced militants to make decisions and appeals to loyalty to the organization in the absence of a real understanding of the issues. If it suffered from these weaknesses, the ICC could also identify the general framework which gave rise to them : the long years of the counter-revolution, a lack of confidence and experience, the nature of the class struggle in the phase of decadence, the isolation of revolutionaries, the difficulty of keeping alive an organization of non-professional revolutionaries. But it could not really remedy these weaknesses. This is what provoked and accelerated its downfall.

It is therefore in the general framework of these weaknesses which would only worsen as time passed, that we fought our "battle". From the time of the appearance of disagreements on the question of class consciousness/consciousness of the class, the very way the debate came up was tainted. While there was an unprecedented heterogeneity of thought in the organization, characterized by opposition expressed by a third of the members of the central organ and by whole sections of the ICC, open political confrontation was replaced by the establishing of a rapport de force, at no matter what the cost. It was decreed that there were "good comrades" with minority positions who had a chance of being saved, and "bad ones", who by their behavior, their hesitations, could only drag the ICC into the hell of centrism and councilism. All this in a totally arbitrary way, without any concern for arguments or clarification, despite the coherence of the divergences expressed. All the "bad" minority comrades were thrown in the same bag, under the common label of centrism, and thus the manoeuvre was complete. No further debate was necessary. In its place, there were more and more hysterical incantations to exorcise councilism, the greatest danger. The texts to explain votes, political contributions and theoretical deepening undertaken by comrades with minority positions were systematically ignored because they were "centrist".

It was to shed some light on this political and organizational dynamic that some of the comrades with minority positions, who held fast to their principles despite

much pressure and manoeuvres, would, in May 1984, sign a "Declaration on the Debates in Progress in the ICC", which was the beginning of a future tendency. We will quote it at length here.

"In opposition to the position taken by the majority of the central organ concerning a so-called "tendency towards centrism, towards conciliation with regard to councilism in the ICC", we wish to draw the attention of the ICC to the non-validity and the danger of such assertions which are inapplicable:

-both to the present debate on class consciousness (including the reservations and criticisms made on point 7 of the central organ's Resolution)

-and to the activity of the ICC since the 5th Congress and our needs in the present context of an acceleration of history....

2. In searching for converts to Ruhle within the central organ, by accusing members of it of "conciliation and lack of firmness in regard to councilism", by accusing them of going back on the foundations of the marxist theory of the role of the party, the central organ is completely wrong about the debate and in its choice of target. To stop these gratuitous accusations, we hereby and unambiguously reaffirm our defense of the active, indispensable role of the party in class struggle as a militant vanguard of the proletariat.

3. The question at the origin of the debate is a deepening of our understanding of the development of class consciousness in a historic course towards class confrontation on the basis of an economic crisis and not a world war. This deepening is all the more important because it must answer a whole series of problems raised in evaluating the class struggle today. It is in this framework that the criticisms of point 7 of the central organ's Resolution were raised. These criticisms dealt with the inadequacy of distinctions such as "class consciousness" and "consciousness of the class", "spread" and "depth" -- considered to be ambiguous or false -- to analyse the dynamic of class struggle in the years of truth, its retreats and advances, its subterranean and manifest maturation. In no sense did they imply putting in doubt the role of revolutionaries in this process. On the contrary,

4. By mistaking the debate and its target, by launching a quixotic campaign against councilist windmills, the central organ has not only given the organisation an inadequate framework for its thought, but obscured the original point

of the debate and worse, opened the way towards a political regression in the future.

5. The Resolutions of the central organ are in the process of creating a veritable myth of the word "centrism". Centrism can be historically considered as looking to conciliate proletarian positions and bourgeois positions. The debates in progress in the ICC (whether it be on class consciousness, our organisational weaknesses or the analysis of the resurgence of class struggle) do not in any way participate in any tendency towards conciliation between proletarian acquisitions of the ICC and bourgeois ideas or even councilist conceptions. It is not a question of centrism in the ICC.

The central organ has invented a definition of centrism whose content is simply a static list of the weaknesses noted at the Extraordinary Conference 2 years ago and which, as such, draws us backwards instead of going forward. "Centrism" has become an incantation to exorcise our weaknesses, an alienated representation of the real life of the ICC.

6. The pseudo-psychological definition the central organ gives for centrism (a "phobia" against sharp positions, a "taste" for conciliation, "hesitations", etc) is merely a way to run away from the real debates and create an atmosphere of panic and self-guilt in the whole ICC. Rather than attacking the real problems, the central organ is launching the ICC into running ahead blindly into a vacuum with all this talk about "centrism" in relation to councilism, then "dangerous slippings towards centrism in relation to councilism" and finally "a tendency to slippings in relation to... hesitations" ! And since questioning, trying to find the right path, is present at the start of every debate, any critical spirit now risks being condemned under the accusation of "hesitation" and "centrism"...

7. Given that :

- the debate has been confused from the outset by the central organ
- the framework of the central organ has become a catch-all encouraging confusion and lack of analysis of class struggle and our intervention
- the clarification of divergences on point 7 requires a theoretical discussion of great depth,

it is inevitable that the votes asked for immediately by the central organ led to false unanimities or positions without real clarity and we make an appeal to all of the ICC not to give in to precipitation or localist

focalization in the debates and to carry on the clarification of these debates, blocked by the incorrect framework of the central organ. This is the first time that it has made such an important, basic error but the ICC can correct this error..."

The violence of the reaction that this declaration provoked was surely the first important manifestation of the real process of degeneration on which the ICC had embarked. In refusing to look at its actions critically, worse in politically justifying the organizational practices it utilized, the ICC condemned itself to an irreversible sclerosis. What follows is but a taste of the organization's reaction. "The procedure employed by the signatories of the declaration, the way in which it was made known to the organization, perhaps smack of high strategy, but are alien to the ICC. It all recalls our worst memories because it resembles a bit too much the procedures employed by Chenier (at the time, the ICC had designated this latter as an "adventurer", "a shady individual". We see nothing harmful in individuals sharing the same positions meeting to debate, to write and present a document: we are for the right of minorities to constitute tendencies within the organization... What we will not tolerate are "clandestine" tendencies, intrigues and obscure machination..."

A new spirit was therefore given to the general mobilization of the organization against the minority by the utilization of a dirty trick: the assimilation of comrades with minority positions* to suspicious elements, maneuverists, potential saboteurs of the organization; these suspicions were disseminated without any proof of the accusations made (which in any case could not have been found). In reality, the very ferocity of these reactions, the proof it contained of the political content of the declaration, demonstrated the profound incapacity of the ICC to theoretically justify its new orientation, its 180 degree turn. To sow fear, to try to terrorize and paralyze the militants with low insinuations, was the only way to make them swallow all this. But this was only the beginning of a series of maneuvers. A certain clarification was taking place amongst the minority comrades, several of whom had given way in the face of the majo-

*Comrades who had always carried on their struggle openly, in a militant and responsible way, without any harm to the general functioning of the organization, with the goal of convincing the ICC of its errors.

rity orientation, at the same time as the points of view of others increasingly converged. This process in its turn required a real clarification amongst them through meetings, to make possible an exact delimitation of the remaining divergencies, to organize political contributions to be written as a minority, etc.

While the majority itself declared its readiness to "tolerate" such meetings of the minority, they were prohibited for a whole series of reasons, each one more confused and incoherent than the other. What it came down to was:

- The prohibiting of meetings between minority comrades, when such meetings were (as they would be in any still healthy proletarian organisation) essential to decide whether or not to give an organized form (tendency or fraction) to the ever-deepening divergences;
- Numerous attempts at division and demoralisation of the comrades with minority positions, under the pretext that they were not all in agreement and therefore could not meet;
- Innumerable disciplinary resolutions against particular minority comrades, introducing a personalisation into the debate;
- 'Relieving' minority members of certain functions that they had, under the pretext that the divergences prevented their fulfillment.

While the ICC in its own statutes and in its critique of Bordigist organisations (among others) laid claim to non-monolithism and the vital necessity for a revolutionary organization to admit the existence of divergences and organized minorities, it is its own practice, and not that of the minority (as the ICC insinuated) which is contrary to this. Moreover, this is why later, once more in order to retroactively justify its own regressions, the majority would propose a reformulation of its statutes for the 6th Congress of the ICC, with criteria for the existence of organized minorities which would make them practically impossible.

But the worst was yet to come. At the beginning of 1985, as a necessary step in the whole process of reflection and understanding in which they were engaged and also in the face of the gravity of the situation and the conceptions which had been accepted in the ICC, the minority comrades constituted themselves as a tendency. This took place on the basis of a resolution whose essential content is summarized in the constitutive declaration of the tendency published in this issue. The reactions were not long in coming. At the very moment at which our tendency was constituted, the ICC officially announced the closing of the debates within it and the necessity to de-

finitively consolidate the organization around the new orientation. In this logic, for the majority, the ICC had to go forward by giving priority to intervention—which the ongoing debate could only hinder. At the same time, the majority characterized the tendency as having "no basis for existence", as a "new maneuver" (the goal of which was to divert the attention of the organization from the central question of intervention towards secondary, uninteresting problems), as an "irresponsible act". We can only say that it is really strange for a non-monolithic organization to never have a real tendency within it. We can wonder why Lenin in 1921 and the Bordighists afterwards have never dreamed of this expedient: no need to formally prohibit tendencies, simply declare that you don't recognize them; refuse to publish the constitutive declaration of the tendency externally—unless the tendency agrees to make changes so as to make it more acceptable to the majority!

Moreover, this was not the last measure of censorship. The publication in the press of articles written by us would be regularly considered as a 'right' to be accorded or not depending on circumstances; all this in a framework totally lacking in coherence or a real will to take the debate outside the organization, despite the fact that this is the obligation of a revolutionary organization.

This whole atmosphere of maneuvers reached its apotheosis at the time of the 6th Congress of the ICC in November '85. The most sordid part of it all probably lay in the unbelievable blackmail about the platform that the ICC had undertaken. Until April '85, the ICC denied the existence of a contradiction—pointed out by the minority/tendency—between its platform and its new orientations. Then, it was forced to recognize this contradiction, and decided to sacrifice its principles to its new orientation by proposing to change its platform. In all the discussions preceding the Congress, a quasi-absolute majority took shape for the ratification of the proposed changes, which seemed fine in the eyes of the majority. Finally, at the moment of the Congress, just after our expulsion from it, the ICC in the name of so-called divergencies reigning within it decided to postpone these changes!

The 18 months of political and organizational regression of the ICC would end in the exclusion of the tendency from the work of the 6th International Congress, which constituted the most important moment in the life of the organisation since the upsurge of the debates following the 5th Congress.

After 10 years of existence, not only did the ICC put in question fundamental positions, but it also threw away its principles on functioning, preventing the tendency from expressing itself in the face of this programmatic degeneration.

The Tendency had assumed its responsibility during 18 months of debate by actively participating in them, by continually pushing them forward, without letting the divergencies become an obstacle to the accomplishment of their general tasks within the ICC. But at the 6th Congress, there was no longer any pretense of discussing the questions at issue, but simply of solidifying once again a rapport de forces which had little by little been established (see above in this text) in the ICC against the Tendency. After having tried to wear out the minority comrades, right from the opening of the Congress, the central organ would demand of the Tendency a loyalty oath to the organization to cover the period after the Congress. In this completely Stalinist vision of organization, the Tendency had to first guarantee to the majority that it would stay in the organization before it could participate in the Congress - and that independently of the positions and orientations which might be adopted. Therefore, the Congress was no longer a moment of political confrontation and discussion, but a date on which the new orientation -already adopted in a context that should now be clear- were simply and passively ratified. To being put up against the wall and to such blackmail, expressed by threats such as "First promise to continue militant work in the

ICC and you can stay at the Congress", or "first it is necessary to be in agreement with the new orientation...and then a discussion can take place later", the Tendency would refuse on principle to respond, and as a result saw itself asked to leave the Congress. After having written several texts and resolutions just for the Congress, the Tendency, by a maneuver even more sordid than the others, saw itself once again slapped with a prohibition, without any possibility of defending its positions within the ICC.

During 18 months, the ICC had bit by bit shut the door to discussion. At the Congress, there remained only a crack, through which the minority was thrown out. It was the clearest and most serious illustration of its incapacity to tolerate divergencies within its midst.

Such maneuvers must be banished from the workers' movement. They are the characteristics peculiar to exclusions in Stalinist organizations : to demand a loyalty oath from the Tendency came down to demanding that it fold up, that it repudiate its positions; in short, that it be "responsible", but in the bourgeois sense of the term. At the time of its eviction from the International Conference (mentioned above), following similar tawdry maneuvers, the ICC provided a lesson to other groups by writing: "How do you explain to a sect that it must learn to consider the idea...that perhaps it is mistaken?" (International Review #22). At its 6th Congress, the ICC showed that it would be better off first applying its great principles to itself. During 18 months, the ICC had slid towards monolithism. The 6th Congress marked the last step in this process.

Where is the ICC Going ?

Before the 6th Congress, the Tendency had clearly posed the following questions to the majority: is the ICC a crucible for the political life of the class or do all those in disagreement become "centrists", "vacillators", "councilists", thereby closing the door to any debate in the organization? Does an honest and open debate have any meaning or does the ICC only know to carry on debates in which one side is painted as "Chenier's", manoeuvrists "opportunist who prevent intervention? Unhappily for the workers' movement, the ICC would adopt a supercilious attitude which consisted in sticking to a suicidal principle: those who dare question the orientation of the ICC are "worthless" or "frivolous". The logical consequence of such an attitude is to join the ranks of these who wander within

the working class by proclaiming themselves the only true organization. What a sad comeuppance for an organization which had previously correctly fought this same disease in the ICP, which was rotten to the core.

Our Tendency was considered by the ICC to be the least serious that it has known till now. The irony of history is that ours is the first tendency in the history of the ICC which defended the continuity of programmatic positions of the organization, while the ICC slid more and more towards positions that it had itself previously -and correctly- criticized: the very positions that had given birth to the GCI and to the "Chenier Tendency". The new positions of the ICC on the Party and on class consciousness came closer

and closer to those of the GCI when it left the ICC: the identification of class-consciousness with the program that the class must assimilate. So too, the Chenier Tendency had already introduced the idea that the struggle between the proletariat and bourgeois ideology conferred on certain organizations, such as local trade union sections, a "hybrid" nature, half bourgeois, half proletarian. Today, with the position of the ICC on centrist organizations and positions, the same idea comes back under another form. Basically the ICC had learned nothing from these debates, Why?

Because the ICC had never really succeeded in taking to heart the new questions that the development of the class struggle in the present period posed. Because it seemed to it sufficient to assimilate the lessons of the '20's, '30's and '40's, or as a comrade of the ICC pointed out: "the Bolshevik party is our model for tomorrow". The ICC has never succeeded in taking to heart the contradictions and insufficiencies of the Communist Left. That is why it could think that it was sufficient to write a Platform during the years of the constitution or the current and then to simply assimilate it and apply it. Or, more recently, that the period of counter-revolu-

tion was essentially one of theoretical work, while ours was one of intervention. The ICP, the pole of regroupment before 1980, disappeared from the revolutionary scene after the strikes in Poland in 1980, because, believing that it had understood everything, it threw itself into activism. This was a loss for the revolutionary milieu and for the working class, as well as a warning to it. The ICC has not drawn all the lessons from this warning and is in the process of going the same way.

But it would be mistaken to draw as a lesson of this experience that degeneration is the inevitable destiny of every revolutionary organizations. The crisis of the ICC first of all shows that a revolutionary organization can only be a real and active factor in the development of the class struggle if it tries -on the basis of the acquisitions of the past- to develop them in order to respond to the new questions posed by the present period. To this indispensable programmatic development to assure an intervention in the class, there must also correspond a real internal life, fighting against monolithism and sivism. Such are, in short, the positive lessons that we have drawn from the long sickness of the ICC and which impel us to continue the revolutionary struggle.

DOCUMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Under this heading, we intend to regularly publish little-known texts of the workers movement as a contribution to dealing with the problems faced by class struggle today.

But in this issue, we are taking the opportunity to publish some of the texts we wrote as a tendency in the ICC. We have decided to do this because the debates on centrism, councilism, class consciousness and the role of the party concern all revolutionaries and the working class. The texts we wrote were not only intended "to convince the ICC" but for open discussion in the working class movement. This latter aspect became increasingly important as divergences deepened and the ICC closed itself off to internal debate.

The ICC refused to assume its responsibility to organize the publication of its debates to the outside world. Some texts of "internal debate" managed to see the light of day in the ICC press

but the ICC never produced a text synthesizing all of its new orientations and the interconnections between these new positions. The only minority texts the ICC agreed to print were those that dealt with one or another issue in isolation. It systematically censored texts where we tried to discuss the general meaning of the debate and the connections between the different issues (particularly in the Declaration of the formation of the tendency which we print here). The ICC bears the responsibility for having disorganized the debate to the extent that no reader of the press outside the organization can possibly understand why these issues arose or exactly what positions the tendency held, etc. We think it is our task to make up for the ICC's inadequacy in this respect and try to give the reader a maximum of material to understand the meaning of this debate and the positions defended in it.

By publishing these texts, we also want to show that there was an effective and organized reaction against the involution of the ICC, that we fought for our positions to the best of our ability, trying to get to the roots of the issues and denounce the traps that the logic of the ICC was leading it into. In this sense, these texts are a concrete illustration of our efforts against the degeneration of the ICC.

We would like to give some background information on the texts printed here. The "Declaration of the Formation of the Tendency", written for publication, is a summary of the Jan.85 Resolution that served as the basis for the constitution of a formal tendency. The history of this Declaration tells a great deal about the present dynamic of the ICC. The ICC decided not to publish this Declaration. The argument given was that it supposedly contained calumnies against the ICC. In reality, the ICC simply gave itself the right to dictate to a minority what it could (and couldn't) write and think. According to the ICC, the basis of the

formation of a tendency was no longer a historic document of the organization but a piece of paper on which one person or another could impose "changes" as their inspiration of the moment took them. Since we refused to go along with this, the text was forbidden to be published anywhere. We are printing it now because it tries to spell out the connections between the different issues which is essential to understanding the underlying dynamic of the ICC today.

The two other texts were prepared as part of our contributions to the 6th International Congress of the ICC. The resolution on "Centrism and Political Organizations of the Proletariat" synthesizes the position of the tendency on this question, placing the issue in the context of the period of capitalist decadence. "Critique of the Intervention of the ICC" summarizes what we tried to say about the ICC's intervention for many months. It is only a first step in our efforts to better understand the role of revolutionaries in the present period and we hope to return to this question in future issues.

DECLARATION ON THE CONSTITUTION OF A TENDENCY

The present period is a crucial one in the history of the proletariat. After more than 15 years of crisis, world capitalism is inexorably propelled into an economic abyss, building up preparations for world war. The proletariat is being forced to fight back in more and more difficult conditions but with a growing consciousness and determination. The future will bring major social upheavals whose ultimate outcome will decide the fate of mankind: revolution or world war. The ICC is the only organisation to have clearly understood our period but it faces this reality with certain weaknesses and an inevitable lack of experience. The raising of the historical stakes, the understanding of the importance of its role and the need for the formation of a future revolutionary party have put great pressure on the ICC. This has given rise to the introduction of a whole series of positions based on voluntarism and subjectivism:

- the assertion that the workers' move-

ment is basically and permanently diseased by 'centrism', a tendency to conciliate and hesitate, to vacillate between opposing options;

- the assertion that councilism is the greatest danger for the working class; - the distinction in the proletariat between a 'class consciousness' identified with the communist programme, and a 'consciousness of the class' identified with the assimilation of the programme by the class.

After a year of debate during which these new theories have been accepted in the ICC, the comrades in the minority have formed a tendency.

Our tendency maintains that these innovations are contrary to the previous conceptions of the ICC and extremely pernicious for the future of the ICC and the revolutionary milieu as a whole. They take their historical inspiration from theories developed by Trotsky in the 30s. These theories have already shown their bankruptcy in the past by the

passage of Trotskyism into the camp of the counter-revolution during the Second World War. The purely subjective definition of centrism in terms of behaviour and no longer in political terms has no place in the historical method of marxism. Opportunism and its centrist variation were indeed scourges which plagued the workers' movement in the period of struggles for reforms at the end of capitalism's ascendent period. They took root in the existence, at that time, of a minimum programme distinct from the maximum programme. But in the decadent phase of capitalism, the indissociability of the immediate and historical interests of the proletariat has definitively destroyed any basis for this lingering disease within the workers' movement. Any concession on principles means a direct partial capitulation to the bourgeoisie and nothing else. Trying to apply the notions of 'centrism' and 'opportunism' to our period in any coherent way can only lead to erasing the class line between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat by diluting the issues with cheap psychologism as the experience of Trotskyism in the '30s has tragically shown. We are already seeing the ICC trying to rewrite the history of the revolutionary movement of the beginning of this century with positions such as these: Social-Democracy passed into the bourgeois camp in 1921 and no longer in 1914 (that is to say, after Social-Democracy had already accomplished its counter-revolutionary work during the war and the revolution) and the communist parties were proletarian until the '30s - both these positions are in complete contradiction to the Platform of the ICC; counter-revolutionary elements coming from Social-Democracy who were integrated into the Communist International are now rebaptised 'proletarian' thanks to the handy label 'centrists'; the Stalin tendency in the Communist International is also now considered 'centrist', vacillating between the left and the 'right'. These positions mark a regression towards the positions of the degenerating CI against the Communist Lefts. They destroy the lessons drawn from the experiences of this period by under-estimating the reaction of the capitalist state, via its left factions, to ward off the threat of revolution. In the end, these positions offer as the only cause of the defeat, the defeat itself.

Although councilism and its bourgeois position on the party must be firmly rejected, the doctrine of 'councilism, the greatest danger for the working class' contains the same grave dangers. By reducing substitutionism to a secondary 'error', the product of the backwardness of Russia, it negates in practice the fundamental critique that the

ICC has always made against substitutionism as a bourgeois conception par excellence with its roots in the division of society into classes. This doctrine has been able to flourish because of the totally confusionist formulation of a distinction between 'class consciousness' and 'consciousness of the class' which is just a new form of the classic duality of Leninism. Because the ICC claims at the same time to be different from Leninism, it has not only been unable to define better exactly what the indispensable role of the party actually is in class struggle, but it has reduced the entire question to complete haziness - a fertile ground for sterile incantations on 'the necessity of the party' which the Bordighists of the ICP(Programma) used to specialise in. But all their incantations did not prevent them from falling apart under pressure from leftism.

We make these criticisms of the ICC with deep regret. We have been militants of the ICC since the beginning and we are convinced that the political and organisational framework developed by the ICC represents the most advanced point in the history of the workers' movement and the only realistic basis towards the formation of the revolutionary party of the future. But it is part of the situation of the exploited class that the product of long years of effort can be destroyed very rapidly under pressure from bourgeois ideology. Today, the new conceptions introduced into the ICC threaten to corrupt its principles and organisation, and it would be criminal to remain silent. The present situation has not arisen from nowhere. It comes from an insufficient deepening of the lessons of the past and of the Marxist method which has gradually weakened the ICC over the years. It led to a crisis three years ago. But this crisis was not overcome with enough strength to resist the brutal acceleration of history since the end of 1983 which has required the ICC to step up its intervention in class struggle.

The stakes of the debate today for the ICC and the revolutionary milieu in general are plain: whether or not today's revolutionary forces will be capable of engendering a party up to its 'tasks and the significance of this for the working class' chances of success. We reject the notion that the secret of this transformation lies in a simple quantitative increase in the intervention of revolutionaries. The function of the party is to develop class consciousness by defending clear perspectives, and intervention is meaningful only in this framework. Theoretical and historical deepening is not an academic exercise but a vital necessity. The party of the

future will only emerge on the basis of overcoming the contradictions of the previous revolutionary movement, in particular those of the CI, and this means constant critical effort. It is not by accident that debates similar to those in the CI are reappearing in the ICC today (for example, on opportunism and the class nature of the 'left wing' of the Social-Democracy like the USPD in Germany, an issue that took up a large part of the debates at the Second Congress of the CI). The ICC has for too long considered these questions definitively resolved and now it suddenly does an about-face, taking up positions that are a regression from those of the Communist Left at the time. And these positions are of major importance in that they deal with who was the class enemy in the past and thus who will be the class enemy in the future.

If the ICC really intends to assume its responsibilities and keep its promises to the working class, it has got to realise the importance of the present debates as part of the debates to resolve in the revolutionary milieu and it must carry them out openly without trying to precipitate things or stifle them in disciplinary measures, without making debate and intervention into an 'either/or' choice. It must proceed: to

rearm the organisation by returning to a serious critique of the errors of the CI and their extension in the doctrine of Trotsky; to reject the subjectivism that consists of interpreting the class nature of political positions and organisations according to the simple criterion of the attitude revolutionaries had towards them at the time; to return to the method of historical materialism; to reject the notions of opportunism and centrism as applied to the present period which, far from overcoming the weaknesses of the ICC and the revolutionary milieu, will only open the door of the revolutionary camp to the counter-revolution; to recognise substitutionism and anti-partyism as bourgeois conceptions which symmetrically deform the role of the party and which tore apart the weakened Communist Left by driving it into the twin impasse of Bordigism and councilism; to take up once again the difficult task of developing Marxist theory onto a higher level in relation to understanding class consciousness and the role of the party, based on the foundations laid by the ICC. This task is all the more indispensable in that it was left unfinished by the Communist Left and a clear answer on this point is more than ever a crucial element of the present period of slow but profound maturation of class consciousness against the economic crisis.

March 1985

resolution on centrism & the political organizations of the proletariat

1. It is impossible to deal with the question of centrism as a merely academic debate. The entire concept of centrism was born and developed in the workers' movement because of the need to define more clearly the political forces present in class struggle, particularly in terms of the formation of class parties in the present epoch of wars and revolutions. It is no accident that this question is being raised once again today in the ICC, in a period when decisive class confrontations - and therefore the perspective of a new class party - are on the horizon. The nature of tomorrow's party and the attitude of revolutionary groups today in preparing for this perspective will depend on the answer given to the question of centrism. The practical experience of the Third International's tragic collapse, followed by the fiasco of the so-called 'Fourth International', the theoretical framework of the nature of the working class, the decadence of capitalism, and state capitalism as capitalism's mode of existence in the present period, provide the proletariat with all the

necessary material for criticising the concept of centrism and its implications.

2. Because of its condition within capitalism as an exploited and a revolutionary class that bears within it capitalism's destruction, the proletariat is constantly subjected to two contradictory tendencies:

- its own movement towards consciousness of its situation and of its historical destiny;
- the ideological pressure of the dominant bourgeoisie, which tends to destroy its consciousness.

These two irreconcilable tendencies determine the uneven character of the class struggle, which goes through successive advances or revolutionary attempts, and retreats or counter-revolutions, and in which there appear vanguard minorities organised in groups, fractions, or parties, called on to catalyse the class' movement towards its consciousness.

The proletariat can only have one con-

sciousness: a revolutionary consciousness. But because it is born in bourgeois society, and can only liberate itself when it disappears as a class, its consciousness is a developing process, never completed in capitalism, permanently confronting the bourgeois ideology that impregnates the whole of society.

This situation determines the dynamic of the proletariat's political organisations: either they fulfil their function of developing class consciousness against bourgeois ideology, and are situated in practice in the revolutionary camp, or they succumb to bourgeois ideology, and are integrated in practice into the bourgeois camp.

3. The demarcation of camps among political organisations is itself a developing historical process, determined by the objective conditions of the development of capitalism and of the proletariat within it. Since the beginning of the workers' movement, a process of decantation has occurred which has progressively limited and defined the proletarian political terrain.

At the time of the First International, the development of capitalism was still characterised, even in the heartlands of Europe, by the introduction of large-scale industrial production and the formation of the industrial proletariat from the declining artisans and the dispossessed peasantry. At this stage of the development of the proletariat and of its consciousness, the frontiers of the workers' movement could still contain such dissimilar currents as Bakuninist anarchism and Proudhonism, coming from the petty bourgeois and peasant past, Blanquism, anchored in the Jacobin intelligentsia, Mazzinism with its programme of radical republicanism, and Marxism, the fully developed expression of the revolutionary proletariat.

At the time of the Second International, the end of the period of national revolutions and of the childhood of the industrial proletariat had considerably reduced the frontiers of the workers' movement, by obliging the proletariat to constitute itself as a distinct political party, in opposition to all the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois currents. But the necessity of struggling for reforms within ascendant capitalism, the coexistence of the 'minimum' and 'maximum' programmes during this period, allowed currents like anarcho-syndicalism, centrism and opportunism to exist in the proletarian political camp alongside revolutionary Marxism.

In the present epoch of capitalist decadence, in the era of state capitalism,

the era of the integration of the mass parties and trade unions into the cogs of the state capitalist machine and of the impossibility of reforms in a situation of permanent crisis and the objective necessity of the communist revolution - an epoch opened by the First World War - the proletarian political camp is definitively limited to revolutionary Marxism. The different opportunist and centrist tendencies, with their programme of parliamentarism and legalism, with their strategy of attrition based on the mass parties and the trade unions, have passed irrevocably into the capitalist camp. The same is true of any organisation that abandons in any way the terrain of the world revolution, as was to be the case for the Third International with the adoption of 'socialism in one country', and for Trotskyism with its 'critical' support for the Second World War.

4. The question that revolutionary Marxism must ask itself, faced with the historical phenomenon of opportunism and centrism, is not whether or not proletarian organisations are threatened by the penetration of bourgeois ideology, but how to understand the particular conditions in which this penetration could give rise to the existence of currents distinct from both revolutionary Marxism and the bourgeoisie. The working class and its organisations - however clear they are - are by their very nature always penetrated by bourgeois ideology. This penetration takes on the most varied forms, and it would be seriously under-estimating it to search out only one of its forms. The outcome of the combat between class consciousness and bourgeois ideology in an organisation leads either to the development of the former against the latter, or to the destruction of the former by the latter. In the epoch of capitalist decadence, when class antagonisms are expressed in a clear-cut manner, this means either the development of the revolutionary programme, or a capitulation to the bourgeoisie.

The possibility of a 'third path' during ascendant capitalism - i.e. the existence of currents and positions that were neither truly bourgeois nor truly revolutionary within the workers' movement - was the result of the room left by an expanding capitalism for the proletariat's permanent struggle to improve its living conditions within the system, without putting the system into danger. Opportunism - the policy that sought immediate success - and centrism - a variant of opportunism, trying to reconcile the latter with a reference to marxism - developed as political forms of the reformist disease that gangrened the workers' movement during this epoch.

Their objective basis lay, not in any fundamental differentiation of economic interests within the proletariat, as Lenin's theory of the 'workers' aristocracy' put it, but in the permanent apparatus of the trade unions and mass parties which were tending to become institutions within the framework of the system, integrated into the capitalist state, and separated from the class struggle. When capitalism entered its period of decadence, these organisations moved definitively into the capitalist camp, and with them went the reformist, opportunist and centrist currents.

Henceforth, the immediate alternative posed for the working class is revolution or counter-revolution, socialism or barbarism. Reformism, opportunism and centrism have lost all objective reality inside the workers' movement, since their material basis - the winning of reforms and immediate successes without any struggle for the revolution, and the corresponding mass organisations - no longer exists. All policies that aim at immediate success while holding back from the revolution have become, from the proletarian point of view, an illusion and not an objective reality. They represent a direct capitulation to the bourgeoisie, a counter-revolutionary policy. All the historical examples of such policies in the epoch of decadence, such as the Communist International's policy of 'going to the masses', show that, far from leading to immediate success, they lead to complete failure, to the betrayal of organisations and the defeat of the revolution in the case of the CI. This does not mean that any proletarian organisation that degenerates passes over immediately and totally to the bourgeoisie. Outside the crucial moments of war and revolution, capitulation to the bourgeoisie may be a partial and progressive process as the history of Bordigism shows. But this does not change the general characteristic of the process, the permanent contradiction between revolution and counter-revolution, the perversion of the first into the second, without passing through any ideologies of an intermediary type, as were opportunism and centrism.

5. The thesis developed by Trotsky in the 1930s, and taken up again today by the ICC, according to which opportunism and centrism represent in their essence the penetration of bourgeois ideology, defined simply in terms of 'political behaviour' (lack of firmness in principles, hesitation, attempts to reconcile antagonistic positions), within the organisations of the proletariat, is a radical departure from Marxism's historical materialist method:
- from materialism, because it stands reality on its head by considering political currents as the result of behav-

iour, instead of considering behaviour as the result of political currents defined by their relationship to the class struggle;

- from history, because it replaces the whole general evolution of the proletariat and its organisation by fixed categories of particular types of behaviour, which are unable to explain this historical evolution.

Its consequences are disastrous for a whole series of essential aspects of the revolutionary programme:

(i) By placing the origins of the weaknesses of proletarian organisations in a hesitating behaviour, it opposes to this another behaviour - willpower - and so bases its perspective on voluntarism, a deviation typical of Trotskyism in the 1930s.

(ii) Applied to the epoch of capitalist decadence, it leads to the rehabilitation into the proletarian camp, of the 'centrist' current, and thereby of the Social-Democracy after its participation in the First World War and the crushing of the post-war revolution, of Stalinism after the adoption of 'socialism in one country', and of Trotskyism after its participation in the Second World War. In other words, it leads to abandoning the objective criterion of internationalism - participation in war or revolution - to demarcate the proletarian and the bourgeois camps; to the recognition of nationalist positions - such as 'socialism in one country' for Stalinism, or the Trotskyist 'critical support' for imperialist war - as expressions of the proletariat.

(iii) As a result, it alters, among other things, all the lessons drawn from the revolutionary wave, and justifies, however critically, the policy of opening the Third International to the counter-revolutionary elements and parties of the Social-Democracy, thereby constituting a serious danger for the revolution and the party of tomorrow.

(iv) In the final analysis, it implies calling into question the revolutionary nature of the proletariat and its consciousness, because, if centrism designates all cohabitation of contradictory positions, then the proletariat and its organisations are always and by nature centrist, since the proletariat necessarily drags with it the marks of the society in which it exists, of bourgeois ideology, while at the same time affirming its revolutionary project.

6. The truth of a theory lies in practice. The application of the concept of centrism by the Third International in the formation of the communist parties in Europe, and by the Trotskyist Left Opposition in the formation of the so-called 'Fourth International', provides the definitive historical demonstration

of its bankruptcy in the epoch of capitalist decadence. Its lack of clarity on the henceforward bourgeois nature of 'centrism' led the CI into a policy of compromise with the counter-revolutionary Social-Democratic tendencies and parties, by opening the doors of the International to them, as was the case in Germany where the KPD had to amalgamate with the USPD, or in France, where the PCF was formed from the SFIO which had participated in the 'Sacred Union' during the war. In the same way, Trotsky's conception of centrism dragged him into a voluntarist policy of building a new International and of entrism into the counter-revolutionary Social-Democracy. In both cases, these policies enormously accelerated the deaths of the CI and Trotskyism.

The fact that the Communist Lefts continued to use the terms 'centrism' and 'opportunism' is in no way a proof of their adequacy, but an expression of the Left's difficulty in immediately drawing all the theoretical lessons of the experience they had just been through. The Lefts were at least clear on the main point, i.e. the counter-revolutionary function assumed by the currents described as 'centrist', but their analysis was weakened by their resort to concepts applicable to the degeneration of the Second International. As witness, we can call the untenable positions of Bilan on the duality between Stalinism's (proletarian) 'nature' and (counter-revolutionary) 'function' after 1927, and on the description of the USSR as a 'proletarian state' right up to the Second World War.

7. An organisation's class nature is determined by the historical function that it fulfills in the class struggle, for an organisation does not emerge as a passive reflection of a class, but as one of its active organs. Any criterion based solely on the presence of workers (as for Trotskyism) or of revolutionaries (as for the ICC today) within an organisation, to determine its class nature, is derived from idealist subjectivism and not from historical materialism. The passage of a proletarian organisation into the bourgeois camp is essentially an objective phenomenon, independent of the consciousness that revolutionaries may have of it at the time, because it means that the organisation confronts the proletariat as part of the objective, adverse conditions of capitalist society, and that it thus escapes from the subjective action of the proletariat. The continued presence of workers, and even sometimes temporarily of revolutionary fractions within it is in no way contradictory with this fact, since the function that it then fulfills for the bourgeoisie is precisely that of controlling and mystifying the proletariat.

There are decisive historical criteria that mark the passage of an organisation into the capitalist camp: the abandoning of internationalism, participation in war or counter-revolution. For the Social-Democracy and the trade unions, this passage took place during the First World War, for the CI with the adoption of 'socialism in one country', for the Trotskyist current during World War II. Once this passage has taken place, the organisation is definitively dead for the proletariat since, henceforward, the principle that Marx put forward against the capitalist state, of which it is now a part, must be applied to it: it cannot be conquered, it must be destroyed.

The death of an International means the simultaneous betrayal of all or the majority of the parties of which it is comprised, through the abandoning of internationalism and the adoption of a nationalist policy. But because these parties are each integrated into a national state, exceptions may exist, determined by specific national conditions, as was the case in the Second International. These exceptions, which were not repeated during the collapse of the Third International with the unanimous adoption by the CPs of Stalinist nationalism, in no way disprove the general rule, nor the necessity for these parties to break completely with the policies of their one-time 'fraternal' parties. For a certain time, there may continue to exist within the latter, revolutionary currents or fractions which do not immediately understand the change in the situation, and which are led later on to break with the party that has gone over to the counter-revolution. This was the case with the Spartakists in Germany, first in the SPD and then in the USPD. This process has nothing in common with the impossible birth of a proletarian organisation from a bourgeois organisation: these parties break organisationally with the party that has gone over to the bourgeoisie, but represent the programmatic continuity of the old party from which they were born. This expresses the general phenomenon of the lag of consciousness behind objective reality, which appears even when these fractions have left the party. Thus, even though all the left fractions had been excluded from the CI by 1927, the Italian fraction continued to analyse the CI and the CPs as proletarian until 1933 and 1935 respectively, and a large minority within it continued to defend the reference to the CP after the analysis of the latter's death in 1935.

8. The subjectivist method that takes the continued presence of revolutionaries within an organisation as a criterion of its class nature completely dis-

arms revolutionaries in the task of the formation of the party. Revolutionaries fight to the end to keep a party for the proletariat, but if their mere presence within it is enough to save the party for the proletariat, this means that there can never be any reason for them to break with an organisation until they are excluded. This circular reasoning boils down to leaving the initiative to the enemy. On the one hand, it encourages the over-hasty condemnation of a party in the case of an early exclusion; but, on the other, it paralyses revolutionaries in the opposite case where a party that has gone over to the bourgeoisie is ready to keep revolutionaries within it as a warranty of its 'working class' appearance - as was the case with the USPD and a whole series of Social-Democratic parties in the revolutionary movement at the beginning of the century. By suppressing the objective criteria of parties' class nature, it also suppresses the objective necessity of the formation of the revolutionary party. And so the circle is closed: the theory of centrism produces the 'centrism' that it claims to describe and combat, and thereby engenders itself in a

vicious circle which can only lead to the conclusion that the working class and its consciousness are centrist by nature.

9. When it arrives at these conclusions, the theory of centrism as a permanent disease within the workers' movement appears for what it really is: a capitulation to the bourgeois ideology that it claims to combat, a refusal to draw the lessons of historical experience, an alteration of the revolutionary programme.

The rejection of this theory, the continuation of the Marxist analysis of the lessons of the past and the conditions of the class struggle in the present epoch on the basis of the work of the Communist Lefts, and the recognition of the impossibility of centrism in this epoch, is the opposite of a disarmament of the revolutionary organisation faced with bourgeois ideology. It is the indispensable armament for combatting this ideology in all its forms, and for preparing the formation of a real revolutionary party.

October 1985

our function today: critique of the intervention of the ICC

I. Why a Text on Intervention?

The tendency did not begin on the basis of a disagreement on intervention. On the contrary, tendency comrades have frequently repeated their basic agreement with the ICC's general emphasis on the need for a wider and more intensive intervention in the present period.

But comrades of the tendency did begin to formulate criticisms, even divergences, on certain organizational practices in relation to this intervention.

The fact is that at first, we just concentrated on the fact that the organization had correctly identified the re-emergence of the 3rd wave of struggle, had begun to grasp its general characteristics and to draw the basic conclusion: the need to develop the intervention aspect of our activity. All this seemed politically correct and since we agreed with this position, we did everything we could to carry it out in practice.

But along with this analysis of the period and the acceleration of our activities, a debate began on "class consciousness" as opposed to "consciousness of the class", "centrism", and "councilism, the greatest danger". This debate was supposed to arm the organization to respond to the demands of the period.

But this framework proposed by the organization contained fundamental errors of method. As several texts of tendency comrades have already pointed out, an incorrect framework inevitably has a detrimental effect on all of the practice of an organization.

Although the ICC identified the basic characteristics of the period, it did not go on to clarify more deeply on self-organization, extension and generalization of struggles, class consciousness and the role of the party -- all concepts important not only for the present but especially for the future.

All the ICC has done up to now is to either "accept" or "reject" certain words (like: a qualitative leap in consciousness or subterranean maturation) without really developing what they mean. With the watchword "councilism is the greatest danger", it has thrown itself into intervention without dealing with the questions raised by this intervention and the period. Attempts to deal with these questions at the beginning of the 3rd wave were never followed up. Discussion dried up and activity was completely devoted to intervention (but not its content!) detached from any political deepening. The whole situation is a sign of an absence of marxist method. The

whole notion of process, of a dynamic interaction between different elements, the notion of totality, were increasingly left aside in favor of superficial reactions, a partial and fragmented view of our activity and the idea that knowing the general potential of the period was enough to abstractly explain everything going on.

Above all, the organization refused to recognize the importance of letting the debate on these questions develop among the comrades. These weaknesses have come to the fore particularly in the past year, showing what a dangerous cycle the ICC has embarked on.

This text does not intend to be a detailed criticism of specific interventions although examples will be given. The text is an attempt to show the ICC's lack of an overall response and the effect of this failure on its practice. We hope that it will be read by comrades in preparation for the 6th Congress as a contribution to dealing with the problems we all face and not simply dismissed from attention with the excuse that "the tendency is against intervention".

II. Our Function

International Review #29 reminds us that the function of a revolutionary organization is to be an active factor in the process of the development of class consciousness. It also reminds us that revolutionaries are necessarily a minority in the period of capitalist decadence.

The ability to understand our function is a key issue today. Our capacity to translate our general long-term perspectives and the clarity of our analyses into daily activity and intervention is fundamental to the way the working class will be able to forge its arms for the mass strike and the future revolutionary period.

In its fragmented response to the demands of the period, the ICC, despite all its proclamations to the contrary, shows that it has not grasped the urgency of the question of our function, nor the fact that this question is relevant for today and not just for the future.

How has the organization concretely demonstrated, in its practice on intervention, an understanding of our function as expressed in the IR#29? How have the new concepts of centrism, "class consciousness vs. consciousness of the class" and councilism, the greatest danger, all contained in the present debate, "enriched" this, if at all?

We've seen the ICC present in a large number of conflicts, intervening essentially through leaflets (which has led to the practice of "leaflets for one factory" as well as local and regional ones in Belgium, France and Germany); interventions in different conflicts and demonstrations where we have recently called on workers to join union demobilization

demonstrations to transform them into assemblies of proletarian content; and a call to our militants to intervene at the beginning of all struggles so that we can counter-act union recuperation.

The general questions emerging from this are :

- how does the ICC see the general potential of the period concretized in each strike or demonstration?
- what type of intervention follows from this vision?
- how are the characteristics of this intervention the reflection of the confusion of the present debates?

1. The Potential of the Period

Many aspects of our activity are determined by the period, that is, the existence of the 3rd wave of class struggle. Although the organization grasped its general contours, we have too often limited ourselves to general potentials and not to how these general tendencies are concretely realized at any given moment of struggle in one place or another --in other words, the immediate expression of this potential in the different movements.

At the time of the public service strike in Belgium in Sept. 83, the organization was slow in recognizing the general characteristics and remained too fixated on the specificities of the moment. At that time, we were slow in seeing the general political potential of the new wave of international class struggle and how it gave meaning to the events in one country.

Little by little, the organization recognized the general potential contained in the large-scale movements that broke out in all the countries of Europe. But, although this general framework is absolutely essential to understand the political implications of events, we have now gone over completely to the opposite extreme (the other side of the coin of the same error in method) and we see only the general potential and completely and totally deny the existence of counter-valing tendencies or various subjective and objective conditions acting in the concrete movements we find ourselves in.

An idea has grown in the organization (and it has had a great effect on our intervention) that every movement, demonstration and strike has the same importance, is to be considered on the same level, for the simple reason that every one of them takes place in the framework of the 3rd wave. We are seriously confusing the general potential with its immediate expression in reality which depends on complex objective and subjective conditions.

The organization's denial of specific conditions is a sign of a mechanistic

and immediatist approach which contains no overall understanding of how potential is realized through a process. It sees every movement, demonstration, etc. as just so many "little pieces" of potential imposed on each struggle.

One of the most striking examples of this failure to analyse immediate conditions is the organization's call to join union demonstrations and "days of action"!.. Two sorts of arguments have been used to rationalize these calls :

- a reference to the period in general,
- the fact that the left in opposition "occupies the terrain" and thus the need for the proletariat to confront it in order to progress in class consciousness.

The first argument reveals a desire to fit reality into an abstract schema which leaves us unable to deal with the differences between movements or between episodes of the same movement. If we take, for example, the miners strike in Britain, we can identify a key moment where a crucial and positive immediate content was revealed. This moment took place in July-August 84 at the beginning of the dockers strike in solidarity with the striking miners when extension of the struggle became a real immediate issue and possibility. This situation demanded an immediate and intense intervention whose content would push in the direction of a development of the potential in the immediate sense. But, several months later, in this same miners strike, the struggle gave signs of reflux, concretized by a call from base unionists to come to a dead-end demonstration against repression. We of course had to be politically present in this demonstration but no longer in the sense of the immediate movement (which was in reflux) but rather to vigorously denounce the union tactic of demobilization and demoralization, warning workers against bourgeois manoeuvres. In this period of upsurge in class struggle, if we want to fulfill our role, we must hang on to the meaning of the general movement which defines the maturation of consciousness within the class. It is clear that, for us, union demonstrations go against this general movement and in this sense, calling on workers to join them is doing the opposite of what a revolutionary group exists to do.

The second argument inevitably touches on how we understand our function and the growth of class consciousness. By calling on workers to throw themselves into the arms of their class enemy because this way they will supposedly serve their apprenticeship in confronting unions, the ICC is developing an "educationalist", pseudo-pedagogical approach that can lead to the worst kinds of aberrations!

2. The Kind of Intervention Appropriate to Our Present Level of Understanding

What we have tried to show is how little the organization has deepened its analysis of the period and how it has tried to "make up for this" by trying to fit reality into an abstract schema, falling into a mechanistic, fragmented and immediatist vision of this reality.

With these weaknesses and with all the aberrations of the general framework of the organization's thought (centrism, etc.), it is inevitable that the practice of the organization was affected by the same weaknesses that appeared in theory. There are two aspects to this : on the one hand, losing sight of the nature of our intervention because of schematism and, on the other hand, falling into empiricism in our immediate intervention whose instruments (leaflets, etc) reflect this absence of theoretical clarity.

We can identify 4 points which have to be dealt with. In the absence of any overall political evaluation of its intervention by the organization, we offer these elements as the tendency's balance sheet.

- how do we see our influence?
- our presence?
- the balance of forces between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat?
- how do we adapt our intervention to our analysis of objective and subjective conditions?

A. Our Influence

In the past, we have always felt that we had to work towards being able to influence the general course of events. Today, the tendency wishes to reiterate this basic point : revolutionaries have to try to influence the general course of events. In addition, it is clear that with the development of workers struggles and class consciousness, we will increasingly have even an immediate influence on particular unemployed committees, demonstrations and workers assemblies. But, our intervention is above all a long-term one and we must understand that our influence today is very small. We are only at the beginning of a historical process leading the proletariat to a victorious revolution.

Today, the whole practice of the ICC comes down to a search for a merely local influence on a particular demonstration or factory, as though our role were to "implant ourselves" little by little, factory by factory, region by region, and that the addition of all these little points of implantation will lead to our ability to influence the general course of events. This vision is not correct; it is more like the way mass parties operated in the ascendent period of capitalism. It can lead, if we don't

watch out, to a fragmented intervention, emptied of its general meaning, more akin to the factory infiltration of leftists than the development of political perspectives by a revolutionary organization.

What is raised in this discussion is a veritable regression in terms of our role as revolutionaries because we are limiting our intervention to a merely immediatist aspect. There is no lack of concrete examples of this regression and they will be dealt with further on.

B. Our Presence

The answer to this point follows from the incorrect and reductionist conception the organization now has of its own practice.

A first conception -- that we have to have an influence in every specific struggle today -- is shown in the organization's frenzy to "be everywhere". This is part of the idea that "everything is of the same significance" today and that we have to try to directly influence each of these struggles, demonstrations, etc. in their particularity.

Linked to this idea of a physical presence at every moment, we have been involved in a veritable flood of multiple leaflets, seen as a way to influence the particular struggle. The point is not that we object to putting out a lot of leaflets. The tendency agrees that leaflets today are no longer "exceptional" interventions and that the period requires more of them than ever before. But what do these leaflets correspond to and how do they relate to the overall perspective the organization gives to period we are living through?

Another element that shows that the organization is losing sight of what leaflets correspond to is the idea that "there are two sorts of leaflets, depending on who we want to reach : leaflets addressed to all workers and leaflets addressed to the workers of a specific factory, entreprise or region". Although we must use concrete examples in leaflets and refer to specific situations, it would be wrong to draw the conclusion that there are things we have to say to one part of the class and not to the others. This vision is part of the tendency to fall into the particularism of each situation and suit our intervention to that. This conception of "leaflets by factory", for example, is the caricature of all the regressions today in relation to our function. It is a practice that the section in Belgium, for example, has already concretized by putting out two leaflets for one factory, giving them out in just that one factory. This practice is in blatant contradiction to the perspective of extension of struggles that we are trying so hard to put forward in the working class. We are losing sight of the main point of our intervention : spreading the movements.

Our function is not to try to explain a particular situation by cultivating and emphasizing its particular character (the unions are the ones who work towards isolation by emphasizing particularisms).

Our function is, on the contrary, to make it so that every particular situation can be understood and placed in a general perspective (which relates to what we were trying to say in point 1 on our influence).

C. The Balance of Forces Between the Proletariat and the Bourgeoisie

The fundamental point that determines the way we intervene and the content of this intervention is knowing in what position our class enemy finds itself. This is part of the objective conditions we spoke of previously and that the organization has a tendency to deny today. For example, the practice of the organization has launched the slogan "intervene at the beginning of struggles". Why? Surely no one would defend the idea that revolutionaries are supposed to intervene when everything is over! But behind this insistence on intervening at the beginning of struggles is something more than the logical concern to be there while the movement is still on the upswing. There is the illusion that our presence is going to counter-act, even eliminate, the obstacles put in place by the left factions of the bourgeoisie, the unions, etc. By our intervention and denunciation, we will supposedly, today, speak louder than the bourgeoisie, win the workers from them, make it so that our denunciation finds an immediate concrete application in the movement going on. This expresses a confusion between the impact of clarification and the positive contribution to the growth of class consciousness our intervention represents, on the one hand, and its automatic concretization in a period like today when the bourgeoisie's control and ability to occupy the terrain still obviously exists, on the other hand. This is all part of the idea that our general influence will be the sum of all the different places we have managed to implant ourselves. It is as though we think that our influence will depend on the terrain of each individual struggle. It is as though our ability to counter-act the manoeuvres of a particular union hock at such and such a factory is going to determine our ability to have an impact on the general combat between the classes on a historical level.

D. Adaptations to Objective and Subjective Conditions

We have already referred to this question of different objective and subjective conditions in point 1 on the general potential of the period and how the ICC

tries to shove reality into a schema in a mechanistic, immediatist and undifferentiated way for each struggle, strike or reaction.

It is also linked to the organization's partial and fragmented vision of events, shown in pt. B on the way we see our presence.

The organization has developed the position that there is no longer a bourgeois terrain and a proletarian terrain but the terrain of "economic struggles", thereby blurring the differences between the 2 classes. It is only the next logical step that it call for workers to join union demobilization demonstrations like those organized around the Renault plants in France - and we did so.

About the CGT (the Communist Party union in France) demonstration at Renault : there is a world of difference between not systematically rejecting any and all demonstrations in the working class because they are not "pure" or free of union taint, on the one hand, and on the other hand, failing to denounce certain demonstrations organized by factions of the bourgeoisie on its own terrain with the sole aim of breaking the workers' militancy. Certainly such union actions are orchestrated to respond to some discontent among the workers. But the real question is this : do workers in each and every demonstration have the possibility of really transforming these dead-ends into expressions of their own aims? The answer to this question does not solely depend on the existence of latent combativity in the working class but on the interaction between this potential combativity and other conditions such as the control the unions are able to exercise, etc. This problem should be evaluated by the organization each time it thinks about calling workers to participate in a union demonstration. But the organization refuses to make this evaluation using the excuse that "discussion ruins intervention":

This undifferentiated response to the actual political content of demonstrations we systematically call on workers to join, is part of the same vision that considers a party or an organization as proletarian as long as there are workers still in them even if such an organization has betrayed the principles of the working class struggle. It is with this type of logic that Trotsky justified entryism into the unions.

Comrades have got to realize the gravity of such logic. In the long-run, it leads to abandoning a whole series of our basic principles, the only guarantee of the quality of our intervention in the working class, of our ability to contribute to the process of developing class consciousness. With such logic, with such waffling on the political content of demonstrations, where is the limit of our political presence? The ICC

calls on workers to join union demonstrations because they are "a place for discussion and meeting together". Why then won't it call on them tomorrow to join the unions because they too are places for discussion and meeting together? Maybe it will be enough to call on workers to "transform the content" of unions ~~MEETINGS~~

--like demonstrations--because potentially they have the power to do so! What is the meaning of what a comrade told us : "We should call for workers to go to 'union meetings'? Where is the limit? It is this type of aberration that has led the tendency to speak of leftism in the ICC's activity today and a trotskyist-type logic.

This negation of subjective and objective conditions as well as an immediatist and reductionist vision, leads the ICC to see any demonstration, whatever its content, as a probable spark for the general potential of the period which every reaction must automatically express. This is yet another sign of regression in relation to our function as revolutionaries. All of a sudden, our role is to be a "detonator" on the terrain of each struggle because, in view of the potential of the period, all that is needed is a little "spark"--from us--to light up the powder keg. In other words, the intervention of revolutionaries finally replaces or creates the subjective conditions necessary for the realization of general potential. This is a completely aberrant conception that shows to what extremes the present logic of the ICC can go. Our role is absolutely not to create the subjective conditions but to push the growth and homogenisation of class consciousness to its maximum. And we can do this only by being a clear rallying point for the working class by putting forward a clear political perspective in each struggle. That is the key to the extension of struggles onto a political level. Our most important function is not to cultivate the particularism of each movement but to broaden the perspectives for each struggle, emphasizing the characteristics common to all struggles. Underestimating this in our practice, as the ICC is doing today, is to underestimate the importance of our function in the working class; it is denying the heterogeneous nature of the development of class struggle and consciousness.

3. How This is Related to the Present Debates

The way the organization, in its practice, now deals with its function in terms of the process of class consciousness --and its intervention-- gives a clear example of the link between the 3 questions in debate in the ICC.

Our intervention is now guided by a vision of class consciousness in 2 dimensions, one of which, "class consciousness", is bestowed on the revolutionary organization and acts as a "compass" while the other, "consciousness of the class", consciousness at a given moment on the terrain, has to be brought closer to "class consciousness", in other words a dimension comparable to the "trade-union consciousness" of Lenin's What Is To Be Done. In actual practice, the ICC considers the development of its influence on a general level (class consciousness) as increasingly secondary in relation to actions as a "detonator" on the terrain, at the level of each movement, dealing with the question of the function of revolutionaries only on the level of the supposed "consciousness of the class".

In relation to the physical presence of the ICC, it is no longer a question of taking into account the subjective conditions that can differentiate movements but only of trying to empirically advance the class consciousness of a particular struggle at a particular moment.

The ICC's present framework which says that centrism in relation to councilism is the inherent weakness of the working class and the political milieu, only reinforces the ICC in its activist attitude. To make "consciousness of the class" progress towards class consciousness, all-out intervention in the class at all times is a vital necessity otherwise the working class, sapped by its congenital centrism, will be lost! This intervention has to fight all hesitation either among ourselves in terms of any internal ICC discussion on intervention and the questions it raises or in the movements where we have to shake up the workers and get them out of their questioning mood. For example, the questioning in the working class today regarding unions, leads it to a growing suspicion of unions telling workers what to do even though this is not yet enough to indicate to the workers what they could and should be doing themselves. This state of affairs in the working class is an expression of today's period, a period that will open the way to the future mass strike. But it is also the expression of the way consciousness develops in ups and downs, with intense activity and pauses, through eventually finding solutions to problems raised in the confrontation with the class enemy. The organization's failure to recognize these two elements leads it to call on workers to join the demonstrations of the bourgeoisie, apparently considering that it is more positive that the workers be pushed into the traps of bourgeois control rather than express their suspicion! With all these aberrations in practice, our function is reduced to forcing the working class to confront

its enemy on a terrain which is not its own because of some pseudo-educationalist conception deduced from this incorrect framework for intervention.

III. Conclusion

By not giving itself the means to carry out the theoretical deepening that is the essential basis for any intervention, while at the same time quantitatively increasing this intervention, the ICC is developing wrong and dangerous conceptions. An organization that is not capable of being a clear political rallying point for the working class is not capable of fulfilling the role for which the class created it.

It is therefore urgent, in the tendency's opinion, that the ICC reopen discussion on such fundamental questions as the need to understand the characteristics of the present period more deeply and how they are concretized in specific struggles, what our role is in these struggles and how this fits in with the process of the formation of the party.

Understanding the demands of the period means realizing that it is going to raise new questions for us. It is obvious that the organization must develop as broad an intervention as possible but this can only be effective and not just activism if the content is correct. Thus the formulation in vogue today that "intervention draws behind it all the other aspects of our activity as an organization" shows the organization's lack of understanding of the interdependence and interaction between the three aspects that are the mainstay of our very existence : theoretical work, organizational cohesion and intervention.

In the working class' present state of questioning, our intervention is fundamental. The working class is in the process of facing the unions in struggle and drawing the conclusions from this experience. It is already creating the conditions for extension and self-organization of struggles. But it is not enough to put forward the perspective of "spread the struggle" in an abstract way. We have to be able to develop these questions concretely, but without empiricism. Our function today is not "agitation" but putting forward clear general perspectives that bring together all the latent and open conflicts going on in so many places. This is the way we understand our function today -- the way we can really be an active factor in the development of class consciousness today.

OUR POSITIONS

The external Fraction of the International Communist Current claims a continuity with the programmatic framework developed by the ICC before its degeneration. This programmatic framework is itself based on the successive historical contribution of the Communist League, of the I, II and III Internationals and of the Left Fractions which detached themselves from the latter, in particular the German, Dutch and Italian Left Communists. After being de facto excluded from the ICC following the struggle that it waged against the political and organizational degeneration of that Current, the Fraction now continues its work of developing revolutionary consciousness outside the organizational framework of the ICC.

The Fraction defends the following basic principles, fundamental lessons of the class struggle :

Since World War I, capitalism has been a decadent social system which has nothing to offer the working class and humanity as a whole except cycles of crises, war and reconstruction. Its irreversible historical decay poses a single choice for humanity : either socialism or barbarism.

The working class is the only class able to carry out the communist revolution against capitalism.

The revolutionary struggle of the proletariat must lead to a general confrontation with the capitalist state. Its class violence is carried out in the mass action of revolutionary transformation. The practice of terror and terrorism, which expresses the blind violence of the state and of the desperate petty-bourgeoisie respectively, is alien to the proletariat.

In destroying the capitalist state, the working class must establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale, as a transition to communist society. The form that this dictatorship will take is the international power of the Workers' Councils.

Communism or socialism means neither "self-management" nor "nationalization". It requires the conscious abolition by the proletariat of capitalist social relations and institutions such as wage-labor, commodity production, national frontiers, class divisions and the state apparatus, and is based on a unified world human community.

The so-called "socialist countries" (Russia, the Eastern bloc, China, Cuba, etc.) are a particular expression of the universal tendency to state capitalism, itself an expression of the decay of capitalism. There are no "socialist countries"; these are just so many capitalist bastions that the proletariat must destroy like any other capitalist state.

In this epoch, the trade unions everywhere are organs of capitalist discipline within the proletariat. Any policy based on working in the unions, whether to preserve or "transform" them, only serves to

subject the working class to the capitalist state and to divert it from its own necessary self-organization.

In decadent capitalism, parliaments and elections are nothing but sources of bourgeois mystification. Any participation in the electoral circus can only strengthen this mystification in the eyes of the workers.

The so-called "workers" parties, "Socialist" and "Communist", as well as their extreme left appendages, are the left face of the political apparatus of capital.

Today all factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. Any tactics calling for "Popular Fronts", "Anti-Fascist Fronts" or "United Fronts" between the proletariat and any faction of the bourgeoisie can only serve to derail the struggle of the proletariat and disarm it in the face of the class enemy.

So-called "national liberation struggles" are moments in the deadly struggle between imperialist powers large and small to gain control over the world market. The slogan of "support for people in struggle" amounts, in fact, to defending one imperialist power against another under nationalist or "socialist" verbiage.

The victory of the revolution requires the organization of revolutionaries into a party. The role of a party is neither to "organize the working class" nor to "take power in the name of the workers", but through its active intervention to develop the class consciousness of the proletariat.

ACTIVITY OF THE FRACTION

In the present period characterized by a general rise in the class struggle and at the same time by a weakness on the part of revolutionary organizations and the degeneration of the pole of regroupment represented by the ICC, the Fraction has as its task to conscientiously take on the two functions which are basic to revolutionary organizations:

1) The development of revolutionary theory on the basis of the historic acquisitions and experiences of the proletariat, so as to transcend the contradictions of the Communist Lefts and of the present revolutionary milieu, in particular on the questions of class consciousness, the role of the party and the conditions imposed by state capitalism.

2) Intervention in the class struggle on an international scale, so as to be a catalyst in the process which develops in workers' struggles towards consciousness, organization and the generalized revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The capacity to form a real class party in the future depends on the accomplishment of these tasks by the present revolutionary forces. This requires, on their part, the will to undertake a real clarification and open confrontation of communist positions by rejecting all monolithism and sectarianism.